

L E T T E R S

ON

1507/1303  
The CONSTITUTION, GOVERN-  
MENT, and DISCIPLINE, of the  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH;

HUMBLY SUBMITTED TO

The ensuing VENERABLE AS-  
SEMBLY,

OF  
The CHURCH of SCOTLAND,

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LETTER 3



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THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

THE LONDON

THE LONDON



## ERRATA.

p. 34. l. 12. Churches in Holland. 40. 1, 2. No. Except outrageous tyranny obliged to self-defence, did. 45. 8. Sedulius, 51. 32. Chasuble amict gown, maniple. 70. 12. proflitaters.



# LETTERS

## ON

### CHURCH-GOVERNMENT.

#### LETTER I.

**N**OTHING, my dear Amelius, is more worthy of my attention; nothing more warmly recommended, by scripture and reason, than to *prove all things, and hold fast that which is good* (a). Never did a juncture more necessarily require it, than this, of so much inconstancy and division. A candid inquiry into the government and discipline of the Christian church, is therefore, the present, the serious employ of my inquisitive mind. Whatever connection this have with the happiness of my soul, if it has any foundation in right reason, or the inspired dictates of Heaven; it is at my peril, if I continue wilfully ignorant thereof. If I break one of the least of his commandments, and encourage others to do so; the SAVIOUR has doomed me, to *be called the least* in his kingdom (b). If I add to, deny, or diminish from, what is written in his word, I procure his curse to my soul (c). Nor is my curse causeless. If what God hath appointed; if what Jesus hath ratified in his blood; if what the blessed Spirit hath endited; I, by my unconcern, call trifling, *common, or unclean*; accuse I not the *Most High, and only wise God*, of egregious folly? Blame I not Jesus, of dying *as a fool dieth*? Prefer I not my own imaginations, to the statutes of Heaven? Presume I not, to *teach the Almighty knowledge*?

Meanwhile, should I embrace and maintain principles; should I observe customs; because conveyed by tradition from the fathers; because peremptorily espoused by coun-

(a) 1 Thess. v. 21.

(b) Matth. v. 19.

(c) Rev. xxii. 18. 19.



cils or holy men; would I not, with Romanists, intrude fallible persons into the temple, the room, of my infallible God? Detesting such blind, such Popish, idolizing of mortals, let my whole religion be immediately founded on a **THUS SAITH THE LORD**. Only the conviction of this, will enable me, with Christian bravery, to undergo the severest sufferings, on its account. Only this will enable me, to answer for my conduct at the awful tribunal. Tradition of the fathers; decisions of great and holy men; a painful Christian education, may, and oft are blessed, as the valuable means of discovering, and leading us to the solid foundation of our faith and practice: but wo to my soul, if, deifying these, I depend on them, instead of the royal, the infallible mandates of Heaven. God alone is my Maker, my Lawgiver, my chief end, my Saviour, and supreme Judge; let therefore his **WILL** be my sure, my only guide.

By natural reason, and by the inspired dictates of Heaven, is this will manifested to men. The *former*, I am infallibly assured, God *hath shewed unto men*; and from it, I find writers inspired not seldom to argue (a): the *latter*, I am divinely informed, are endited of God; are able to make me *wise unto salvation*; are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work* (b). In this sacred page, my duty is oft suggested by example. What properties; what acts of God, and of Christ; or of his prophets, apostles, or other saints, are there proposed for imitation: what the imitation of, is divinely commanded, or commended: whatever thing imitable is founded on moral grounds, and is requisite in one age, and place of the world, as well as another; must certainly be always imitate, according to the station and call providence affords me. What was done by saints *as such*, is always to be imitate by every saint. What was done by prophets, apostles, ministers, or magistrates, *as such*, is only to be imitate by such, as were, or are, vested with a similar office. Good acts performed upon ordi-

(a) Rom. i. 19. and ii. 14. 15. I Cor. v. 1. and xi. 13. -- 15. and xiv. 7. -- 11. (b) 2 Pet. 1. 3. -- 7. Tim. iii. 15. -- 17.



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nary occasions, are ordinarily to be imitated. These done upon extraordinary occasions, are only to be imitated on the like (a). Whatever God commends, or promises we shall do; whatever he engageth to assist in, or reward us for, is certainly good; and to be practised, according to our station and call. Whatever he condemns, threatens, or punishes for, is certainly evil; and to be alway avoided (b). Some divine acts found a divine right: Jesus' rising from the dead, his repeated visits to his disciples, his Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Ghost on the first day of the week, divinely consecrate it for the Christian Sabbath. But nothing more clearly founds a divine warrant, than the appointment and precept of God. These HINTS, an attention to which is so useful for understanding the oracles of God, to me appear so plain, as to need no illustration.

But what of the inspired page is the rule of my conduct? God himself informs me, that *all scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*: that, *whatsoever was written aforetime, was written for our learning* (c). What in the Old Testament respects ritual observations, as typical, must indeed be laid aside. Christ the substance having come, and abolished that carnal law of ordinances, by the blood of his cross, it is at my peril to attempt a revival thereof; it is at my peril to abandon the liberty, *where-with Christ hath made me free, and be again entangled in the ceremonial yoke of bondage* (d). But the nature of God, and of men, being alway the same; whatever laws or patterns under the Old Testament, were founded on moral equity, as such, must still preserve their whole binding force. Whatever ancient hints, promises, or prophecies, do, in their fulfilment, respect the New-Testament period, may be justly argued from (e). If I may receive an ancient promise into my heart, as the ground of my sure hope of eternal felicity: if I may obey the ancient laws, of *having no other god before the true God; of making and worshipping no graven image*;

(a) Matth. v. 48. Eph. v. 1. 2. Phil. iv. 8. 9. (b) Rev. ii. 2. 3. 6. 13. and iv. 14. 15. 20. (c) 2 Tim. iii. 16. Rom. xv. 4. (d) Gal. iv. 9---11. and v. 1.---4. (e) Heb. xii. 1. 5. and iv. 4---8. Acts xv. 15.---17.

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of not taking the name of the Lord my God in vain, &c. : with equal reason, must I attend to every thing, *written in Moses and the prophets*, relative to perpetual, universal, and moral equity. The two testaments, which God hath joined, let not me, as a *man of sin*, exalting myself above him, *put asunder*.

Is only the express letter of the scripture, the rule of my faith or practice? No: God, who formed me not a beast, but a reasonable creature, capable to search out the native import, and necessary consequence, of his express declarations, certainly speaks to me *as such*. The necessary consequences of his express declarations, must therefore be no less the rule of my duty, than his express words. To deny this, is fertile of error and guilt. Under pretence of adherence to the express letter of scripture, have Papists introduced their monster of transubstantiation. Under this pretence, have Anthropomorphites affirmed their Maker, a body with *face, eyes, ears, hands, and feet*, such as their own. Under pretence of confining their faith to the express words of inspiration, have Socinians rejected almost every article of the Christian faith. To refuse native consequences of scripture as part of our rule, is practically to publish, that Jesus and his apostles oft perverted the oracles of God: for, by deduction of consequence, he shewed the doctrine of the resurrection was revealed to Moses, at the burning bush; that the sixth commandment forbids angry words; and the seventh lascivious looks (a). And of such deduction of consequences, doth no small part of the inspired epistles to the Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, and others, consist. To restrict our rule to the express terms of inspiration, is to give JEHOVAH the lie, who said, *All scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness*; for, without a rational deduction of consequences, every portion of scripture cannot answer each of these valuable ends. Never, therefore, will any person of judgment, admit this restriction of our rule; till, under cloak of confining his faith and practice to the express words of scripture, he intends to abandon some important article of our Chri-

(a) Luke xx. 37. 38. Matth. v. 21.---23. 28.



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stian faith. Upon the most impartial enquiry, I heartily embrace the sentiments of our valuable Confession of faith (a), "That the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, and man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence deducible therefrom; and, that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of his church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word; which are alway to be observed."

L E T T E R II.

**T**HAT our adored Redeemer has a church, no Christian, no candid reader of the sacred volumes can doubt. Himself hath declared, she is built upon the rock of his divine person, and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against her* (b). The Christian CHURCH alway denotes a society of men professing to believe in, and serve, the Lord Jesus Christ. The scripture, however, does not alway use the word in the same signification; to mark which, is very necessary in our present search. Sometimes CHURCH denotes the whole members of Christ's mystical body, considered in their spiritual and invisible relation to him. Thus, he is made head over all things to *the church, which is his body, and the fulness of him that filleth all in all*. To this, all the elect, and they only, pertain (c). Anon, it denotes all these in the world, who profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him. In this sense, the gospel rendered Jews and Gentiles ONE CHURCH. In this sense, she is *built upon the foundation of the truths published by prophets and apostles*; and hath *evangelists, pastors, teachers, helpers, governments, given to, and set in her*; and is *the pillar, and ground of truth* (d). Sometimes a CHURCH denotes

(a) Chap. i. 6. (b) Matth. xvi. 18. (c) Eph. i. 22. and v. 25.  
(d) Eph. iv. 4. 11. 12. 1 Cor. xii. 12. 13. 28. 1 Tim. iii. 15.

a number of assemblies, worshippers of God in Christ, united in particular fellowship with one another: hence, I read of the CHURCH at Jerusalem; at Antioch; at Ephesus; at Corinth; in Judea; and of the Thessalonians (a). Anon, it signifies a particular worshipping assembly of Christ's followers, to which his word and ordinances are dispensed: hence, I read of the CHURCHES, that is, Christian worshipping assemblies of Judea and Galilee; of Syria and Cilicia; of Macedonia, Galatia, Crete, and Corinth: and of a church in an *upper room*; and of one *in the houses* of Nymphas, of Aquila, and of Philemon (b). Finally, it is taken for the rulers of such worshipping assemblies: so we may understand it, when we are required to tell the church of a scandal; when we are informed, that the commissioners from Antioch were brought on their way by the church; and that Paul saluted the church at Jerusalem (c). For, is it credible, all the Christian professors at Antioch would attend their commissioners part of their way to the synod of Jerusalem? Is it credible, Paul saluted all the *many ten thousands* of Christians at Jerusalem? It is not.

But, to avoid, for the present, every shadow of strife, about the various signification of the word; it is agreed, that the church is a society of men professing to worship and serve the Lord Christ; a society erected upon a supernatural foundation, to bring glory to God, and promote the endless welfare of men. But if she is a society; how can she subsist without laws and ordinances? Did ever human society do so? When nations but approached to the confines of anarchy, what disorder! what butchery! what robbery! what enslaving oppression alway take place! Let the case of Israel, when without judges; let the case of the African nations; let the ancient condition of Scotland, bear witness. If she is a society erected to bring glory to God in the highest; a society erected in flat opposition to the kingdom of Satan, is it possible, but men, who cannot *know spiritual things*;

(a) Acts viii. 1. and xiii. 1. and xx. 17. Rev. ii. 1. 2. 2 Cor. i. 1. Gal. i. 13. 1 Thess. i. 1. (b) Acts ix. 31. and xv. 41. 2 Cor. viii. 1. Gal. i. 2. 22. Tit. i. 5. 1 Cor. xiv. 34. Acts xx. 7. Col. iv. 15. Rom. xvi. 5. Philem. 2. (c) Matth. xviii. 17. Acts xv. 3. xviii. 22. and xxi. 20.

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men, whose *carnal mind is enmity against God*; whose hearts are *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*, if left to be ruled by their own inclinations, must certainly rush on the wildest disorder? Is it possible, but Satan will do his utmost to overturn, divide, confound, and pollute her? Attests not the experience of every age, that no society is more readily infected with corruptions; filled with disorder; or rent by unnatural divisions? Her need of authoritative regulations, is therefore notorious and glaring.

That our Redeemer gave a particular form of government to the Old-Testament church, was never denied: the minutely-described ordinances thereof, are obvious to him, who but glanceth the writings of Moses. The equal, if not superior, need of a government, to the New-Testament church, is undeniable. Satan, now more experienced in deceiving, and his agents, are still alive; still ready to waste this sacred vineyard, if unhedged (a). Her members are still a mixture of *tares and wheat*; of *sheep and goats*. There is still a necessity of discerning between the *precious* and the *vile* (b); still a necessity of trying and censuring *false teachers*; and of guarding the ordinances of God from contempt and pollution (c). Has not Jesus an equal regard to the New-Testament church, as to the Old? Has he left that, which himself so emphatically stiles the *kingdom of heaven*, without any particular laws, or form of government; but the varied inclinations of men? Was he not as *faithful, in his New-Testament house*, as Moses was in the old? If he was. must he not have specified a particular form of government for her, as Moses did? Yes; what thoughtful person can doubt thereof (d)? Hath God not spared his Son, but delivered him for, and to the church? Shall he not with him, freely give her all good things? Is not a divinely institute form of government, a good thing? Tends it not to her peace, order, and spiritual edification? Will he who loved the church, and gave himself for it, refuse to bestow on her a thing so

(a) 1 Pet. v. 8. (b) Matth. xiii. 30. and xxv. 32. 2 Tim. iii. 1.-5. (c) Rev. ii. 2. 14. 15. 20. 1 Cor. xi. and xiv. (d) Heb. iii. 1.-6.



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(a) 1 Pet. v. 8. (b) Matth. xiii. 30. and xxv. 32. 2 Tim. iii. 1.---5. (c) Rev. ii. 2. 14. 15. 20. 1 Cor. xi. and xiv. (d) Heb. iii. 1.---6.

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useful and necessary? Am I not divinely certified, that his word is sufficient to direct me, in *every good work*; sufficient to direct a church ruler, how to *behave, in the church of the living God* (a)? Amid his vision of the New-Testament church, the prophet is directed to teach his people, *the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the outgoings thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof* (b). If no particular form of government is appointed for her, why all this waste of words, from the mouth of the Most High?

Nothing, however, more clearly demonstrates her particular, her divinely institute form of government, than the laws and ordinances thereof, marked in the sacred page. There every thing circumstantial is divinely directed by the general rules of *order, decency, and edification*; of acting in all things to the *glory of God*; and *giving no offence neither to Jew nor Gentile, nor to the church of God* (c). In subordination to these, the very light of nature teacheth me, that the church, as every society, must have a government within herself; which is to be managed in the manner that best answers the end of her erection, the *glory of God*, and the *salvation of men*: That there must be a method of ending her contests, and repressing her unruly members: That in every controversy, not plainly determined by her Master's oracles, the smaller part must yield to the greater: That, after engagement to her rules, every member ought to observe them, unless he can show their contrariety to the sacred word: That, if, by multiplication of members, she must be distribute into several worshipping assemblies, these, to maintain her unity, ought to be jointly governed: That various cases happening, too hard for the decision of a single congregation; various congregations, or their rulers, ought, if possible, to combine for judging the same: That if there be a subordination of judges, there must be a liberty, if injured, to appeal from the inferior, to that which is superior.

The more substantial parts of church-government seem

(a) 2 Tim. iii. 17. 1 Tim. iii. 14, 15. and v. 27. and vi. 13, 14.

(b) Ezek. xliii. 11.

(c) 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40. and x. 31, 32.

plainly



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plainly marked, and particularly enjoined in the sacred volume. THENCE I hear, that Jesus Christ hath called out of the world, a people to himself (*a*). THERE, I discern him giving particular persons the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*; a power of dispensing doctrine, sacraments, and jurisdiction (*b*). I find him prescribing public prayer and thanksgiving; charging ministers to attend hereunto; and to make it for all men, in a known tongue, that the unlearned may say amen (*c*). I find him appointing singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; and charging us to sing with the spirit, making melody in our hearts to the Lord (*d*). I find him appointing the public reading, and expounding of the scripture; with the manner of performing the same (*e*). I find him instituting the sacraments of baptism, and the Lord's supper, with the things relative thereto (*f*); and appointing solemn fasting, and vowing to himself, on every proper occasion (*g*). I observe him prescribing the qualifications and mission of the administrators of his ordinances; and promising his presence and blessing, to attend them in their work (*h*). I find him committing to them, a power, authoritatively to decide controversies (*i*); a power to admonish and rebuke offending members (*k*); a power to reject the obstinate, and absolve the penitent. Time fails me, at present, to enumerate every divine appointment, relative to the order of the church, I see plainly marked in the inspired records: but, if upon a deliberate enquiry, I find there a prescribed account, of her head; of the nature of her government; of her members, officers, and customs; can I, without exposing my ignorance, or my rebellion against God; can I, without incurring hazard to my soul, hesitate a moment, whether he has prescribed her a particular form of government? It is absurd to imagine the former can be fixed; and the latter

(*a*) 1 Pet. ii. 9. Acts xv. 14. (*b*) Matth. xvi. 19. (*c*) Acts vi. 4. 1 Tim. ii. 1--3. 1 Cor. xiv. 14--17. (*d*) Eph. v. 18. 19. Col. iii. 16. 1 Cor. xiv. 15. 16. (*e*) Deut. xxxi. 11--13. Neh. viii. 18. and ix. 3. Acts xiii. 15. 27. Mark xvi. 15. 1 Cor. i. 17. 2 Tim. iv. 2. (*f*) Matth. xxviii. 19. 1 Cor. xi. 20--30. (*g*) Joel ii. 12. (*h*) 1 Tim. iii. 2--8, and iv. 14. Matth. xxviii. 20. (*i*) Acts xv. and xvi. 4. (*k*) Matth. xviii. 15. 18. 1 Tim. v. 20.

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unsettled. Concerning these, under the direction of the divine Spirit, I intend, and may you, Amelius, *search the scriptures*, that we be no more faithless, but believing.

L E T T E R III.

**I**N the heavenly page, methinks, I see my Saviour's sole headship over his body, the church, marked as with a sun-beam. There I am informed, that the *government is upon his shoulder*: that *of his government and peace there shall be no end*: that *he sits upon the throne of his father David, to order it* (a): that *all power is given him, in heaven and on earth*; by virtue of which he sends his ministers to *disciple and baptize the nations, and teach them to observe whatsoever he hath commanded* (b). The Father hath given all things into his hand; hath committed all judgment to him; hath put all things under his feet; hath given him to be the head over all things to the church; given him the key of David, that he may open, and none shut; and shut, and none open (c).

To him alone, the inspired word ascribes manifold PRINCELY TITLES, relative to the church. He is her Lord; her Lawgiver, able to save and to destroy (d). He is God's King, set upon his hill of Zion; the Prince among his people; the Governor, that feeds and rules his Israel (e); the great, the chief Shepherd; the Shepherd and Bishop of souls (f); the head of his body the church: our one Master; the Apostle and High Priest of our profession (g); a Son faithful over his own house.

To him alone are ascribed the ACTS of supreme power and authority in her affairs. It is HIS, to enact her laws; to give commandment to her master-builders, and high

(a) Is. ix. 6. 7. Luke i. 32. 33. (b) Matth. xxviii. 18.---20.  
 (c) John iii. 35. and v. 22. 27. 1 Cor. xv. 26. Eph. i. 22.  
 Rev. iii. 7. (d) Acts x. 36. 1 Cor. viii. 6. Is. xxxiii. 22.  
 Jam. iv. 12. (e) Psal. ii. 6. Ezek. xxxiv. 23. Matth. ii. 6.  
 (f) Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. iv. 4. and ii. 25. (g) Col. i. 18.  
 Matth. xxiii. 8. 10. Heb. iii. 1. 6.

rulers, the apostles (a). HIS, to institute her ordinances, the preaching of the word; the administration of baptism, and the sacred supper; with the administration of discipline; all for her edification (b): HIS, to appoint her officers; to *give gifts unto men*; to *give some apostles*; *some prophets*; *some evangelists*; *some pastors and teachers*: HIS, to prescribe the manner of their entrance and conduct (c). Only in HIS name, are her ordinances dispensed: therein, her assemblies meet; her pastors feed by preaching of truth, and even apostles baptize and dispense the holy feast. In HIS name, every Christian must pray and perform his whole Christian exercise. In HIS name, and with HIS power, must offenders be censured or absolved (d). By the choice of adult Christians, and the ordination of former rulers, must ordinary church-officers be assigned, to exercise ecclesiastic power, in a particular place, or office. From magistrates, as *nursing fathers*, they may receive outward protection, support, and assistance; but their whole power relative to their function, they derive from Christ himself. HE *gives them to*, and *sets them in the church*. HE alone qualifies and authorises them, to dispense word, sacraments, or censures. (e).

If the adored Immanuel be the sole head, and supreme governor, of his body the church, ponder, my dear Amelius, if your vague notions, of the indifferency of the various forms of ecclesiastic government, are not highly injurious to HIS wisdom and faithfulness. Dare you suppose, HE has no fixed plan of regimen, but the multi-form, the ever-changing inclinations of sinful men? To these, will he commit the direction of his beloved body, when he knows, they are *evil continually*? If he is the only head of his church, how criminal; how dangerous, for pope, for magistrate, or any other, to claim a spiritual headship over her persons or causes! It is a presuming

(a) Gal. vi. 2. Acts i. 2. (b) Mark xvi. 15. Matth. x. 7. John i. 33. Matth. xxviii. 19. 20. 1 Cor. xi. 20.---30. Matth. xvi. 19. and xviii. 15.---20. (c) Eph. iv. 7. 8. 11. 1 Cor. xii. 28. (d) Matth. xviii. 20. and xxviii. 19. Acts xix. 5. John xiv. 13. 14. Col. iii. 17. 1 Cor. v. 4. (e) John xx. 21.---23. 2 Cor. x. 8. and xiii. 10.



to sit in the temple, the throne of God; and to give out one's self to be, Jesus Christ the Lord.

#### L E T T E R IV.

**W**ithin the compass of inspiration, nothing is more explicit, than that our adored Redeemer's *kingdom* in the church, *is not of this world* (a); is not of an earthly origin, form, temper, or end. This, dying, he attested to Pilate: the declaration, he sealed with his blood. Her head is a *quickenings spirit*. Her power, offices, ordinances, censures, and ends of erection, are *spiritual*; relate to the soul. Her real members are only such as have *the Spirit of Christ*; and have the *same mind* in them, that was in him. The members of her visible state, must therefore be such, as appear CALLED out of *the world, that lieth in wickedness*, to glory and virtue (b). Such as live in gross ignorance, or open wickedness; in neglect of God's worship; or of relative duties; in profane swearing; contempt of the Sabbath; in malice, murder, drunkenness; in unchastity, theft, covetousness; in extortion, lying, reviling, and the like; are expressly excluded from the kingdom of Christ: hence can never be justly sustained members of his church (c). To compose churches, of persons, known habitually to live in wickedness, is to erect synagogues for Satan, not temples for Christ. To account all Christians, who live in a country where Christianity is generally professed, is notoriously absurd. If Christ's *kingdom is not of this world*; how can seas, rivers, hills, and land-marks, be the limits thereof? What christianizing; what sanctifying virtue, has the air or soil of Britain, more than these of Japan? When the natural presence of Christ did not christianize his neighbours in Nazareth and Judea; how can that of a saint do it, to these around? Say not, these wicked men's Christianity is founded on their infant-baptism. Their baptism

(a) John xviii. 36. (b) 2 Pet. i. 3. (c) If. xxvii. 11. 1 Cor. vi. 9. 10. Gal. v. 19. 20. Jer. x. 25.

founds a reason for a formal casting them out of the church, if obstinate in their sin; but can never atone for their living in open contradiction to baptismal vows. Till perjury, attending a sinful course, diminish its guilt, a baptized person, wilfully ignorant or profane, cannot fail to be worse than a mere Heathen; and so more unfit for a member of the Christian church.

Is wicked mens desire of admission to the sacred seals, a token of their repentance? No: how many desire it, to follow a common custom? to please a natural conscience? or even to divert themselves? After admission, are they not as wicked as ever? Did the Hebrew harlot, who just flamed in lust, sufficiently mark her repentance, by peace-offerings, and pretence to paying her vows (a)? By addressing the Saviour, *Hail Master*, and kissing him, did Judas manifest his penitential grief (b)? Should I, Amelius, swear to be your faithful servant, and yet habitually dishonour and disobey you; abusing every thing put into my hand; would you imagine my solemn, but ever violate, oath, rendered me faithful and honest? If after wasting your goods, and wounding your credit, I should presumptuously desire your bill for the speedy payment of wages; would you reckon this, an undoubted mark of my repentance; a sufficient reason of continuing me in your service; and bestowing on me the distinguished privileges of your family? You would not. The application to our present point, is striking and easy.

No doubt, the children of visible saints are to be accounted members of the Christian church, till, by heathenish principles or practices, they warrant their ejection. *The promise is to church-members and their children.* God is their *God*, and the *God of their seed after them.* Their children are federally *holy*; and *of such is the kingdom of God* (c). Detested be the fancy, that heathenizes all baptized in their infancy; that strips the children of Christians, of privileges conferred on the ancient Jews. If you parents be unconcerned, how your posterity grow up in the knowledge of divine truth; how

(a) Prov. vii. 10.---27. (b) Matth. xxvi. 49. (c) Acts ii. 38. 39. Gen. xvii. 10. 1 Cor. vii. 14. Mark x. 14.

they behave in their morals; whom they hear as their pastors; trample ye not upon the heavenly mandate, that *the fathers unto the children, should declare God's truth? should declare his testimony unto their children, that they may declare it unto another generation (a)?* Rebel ye not against him that speaketh from heaven, *Train up a child in the way that he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it?* and requireth you, *diligently to teach his statutes to your children, when you sit down, rise up, walk by the way, or abide in the house (b)?* If God know, you do not command your children and household, to walk in his way; do not endeavour, that you and your house should serve him: if you refuse to raise up seed in your family to Christ, the Lord; what remains, but, that supply to the church come from another airth, and your offspring, perhaps with yourselves, be eternally destroyed; your seed be cursed; your children left to themselves to bring you to shame (c)? In your dying moments, how shall it affect you, to leave them ruined! At the tribunal; in the burning lake; how shall it torment you, to behold them damned, through your unconcern! to hear them curse you, as the guilty cause! Not only the children of visible saints; but every one willing, ought to be the subject of the church's instructing care. *He that winneth souls is wise.* Instruction, however, prepares for; does not constitute, or suppose, one a member of the Christian church.

Not is real change of nature and state, the criterion of membership, in the visible church. Without it, indeed, none can candidly offer themselves to the sacred seals. But, without it, church-rulers may admit them, if offered. Not man, but the Lord alone, *searcheth the heart.* He admitted the Jews into ecclesiastic covenant with him, though, many of them, *had not a heart to perceive,* or embrace, his truth (d). In order to admission, the Baptist and apostles required probable appearance; not infallible evidence, of mens faith and repentance (e).

(a) Is. xxxviii. 19. Psal. lxxviii. 3---7. (b) Prov. xxii. 6.  
 Deut. vi. 6. 7. (c) Gen. xviii. 19. Josh. xxiv. 15. Deut.  
 xxviii. 18. Prov. xxix. 15. (d) Deut. xxix. 3. 4. 13.  
 (e) Matth. iii. 5---7. Acts ii. 38. 41.



Ananias, Sapphira, Simon the sorcerer, and others, were baptized, who yet remained in *the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity* (a). Many unregenerate members appear in the churches of Corinth; Philippi; Laodicea, &c. (b). Christ compares the Christian church to a *floor* where *corn* is mingled with *chaff*; to a *net*, inclosing *good and bad*; to a *field*, where hypocritical *tares* grow up with the *wheat* (c). Were positive evidence of regeneration, the term of church-fellowship; men would be involved in judging the inward state of others: the consciences of the admitters would be perpetually racked, in such decisions; such as pleased, by solemn dissimulation, might obtain the highest privileges of the Christian church; while gracious persons, labouring under doubts, should be readily deprived of the childrens bread.

Without a visible conversation, correspondent to regeneration; correspondent to the inspired characters of *church members*; no man can lawfully be acknowledged, as such. How does the sacred oracles describe the man, who ascends into the hill of God? As a *saint, and faithful in Christ Jesus*; as a *holy brother, partaker of the heavenly calling*: *whose hands, or outward conversation, are clean from scandal*: *whose heart, his life marks to be pure*: *who doth not lift up his soul unto vanity*; but is serious, sober, and fixed in the faith, and way of God: *who doth not swear deceitfully*; taking sinful oaths, or breaking and ridiculing, what lawful engagements he is under: *who walketh uprightly, worketh righteousness, and candidly speaketh the truth in his heart*: *who backbiteth not his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against him*: *who esteems the society of the saints*; and detests the intimacy of the wicked: *who abhors dishonest gain*; and adheres to his engagements: *who knows and keepeth the truth*: *who professeth his faith in Christ*; and *shews it by his good works*; walking orderly; *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*; and living *soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world* (d). Without a con-

(a) Acts v. 1.---10. and viii. 13.---23. (b) 1 Cor. v. and xi. Phil. iii. 18. 19. Rev. iii. 17. (c) Matth. iii. 12. and xiii. 24. 47. (d) Eph. i. 1. Col. i. 2. Heb. iii. 1. Psal. xxiv. 3. 4. and xv. 2 John 4. 9. 1st xxvi. 2. Jam. ii. 18. 2 Thess. iii. 6. 2 Tim. iii. 1.---5. Tit. ii. 12.---14.

versation, consistent with these characters, it is at our peril, if we admit one, an adult member of the Christian church. *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.*

To his admission, what profession of faith is necessary? Must he profess a religious assent to any histories narrated, or opinions invented, by fallible men? No: it is blasphemous, it is Antichristian, to demand it. Christ allows his ministers to teach nothing, but what he has commanded. He hath denounced a terrible curse upon whoever adds to, or diminishes from his sacred word. He charges to admit into ecclesiastic fellowship, these, *weak in the faith; but not to doubtful disputations* (a). No where doth he allow us to add to the terms of church-fellowship, prescribed in his word; nor, without a tincture of Rome, will any attempt it. What then must be the matter of his confession? The leading truths of the heavenly oracle, concerning the end and rule of religion: concerning the existence, unity, and infinite perfection of God; and his subsistence in three persons, the same in substance, equal in power and glory: concerning man's holy and happy creation state; his fall into sin and misery, and utter inability to recover himself; his redemption by the electing and covenanting love of the Father; the mediation of the Son, in his person, office, and state; and the application of the Holy Ghost; whereby we are blessed, with union to Christ; justification through his imputed righteousness; adoption into his family; renovation into his image; comfort in his relation and fulness; and endless glory in his presence: concerning our duty, in its nature, rule, summary substance, gospel reasons, and particular parts: concerning our improvement of the doctrines and laws of God unto a conviction of our guilt, and danger, and a direction to escape it by means of faith in Jesus Christ; repentance unto life; and a diligent use of the outward ordinances, God has appointed for our salvation; particularly the reading and hearing of his word; the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper; with prayer in his name.

(a) *Ic. viii. 20. Matth. xxviii. 20. Deut. xii. 32. Rev. xxii. 18. 19. Rom. xiv. 1.*

As the truths of God are gradually manifested, the candidate, for church fellowship, ought to enlarge his confession, in proportion thereto. Christ admitted his disciples to his sacred supper, while they had no distinct view of his resurrection; or of the spiritual nature of his kingdom. I cannot, however, persuade myself, that now I may be admitted, except I believe he died for our offences, and *rose again for our justification*: for, *if Christ is not risen, our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins* (a). Who can believe, no more knowledge, no more confession, of gospel-truth, is now necessary to admission, than was, just before the dawn of the reformation? If the divine Spirit chargeth us, *whereunto we have attained, to walk by the same rule, to mind the same thing; to hold fast our profession, the profession of our faith without wavering; to take heed to ourselves, that we lose not these things, which we have wrought* (b). If he warn us, that God's soul shall have no pleasure in us, *if we draw back* (c); it is reasonable, to require such a candidate to confess, what points of sacred truth the church he has been educate in, and joins, has already plainly and solemnly espoused. For such as have ready access to the scripture, to remain ignorant of, or enemies to, any truth, therein plainly revealed, must imply horrid contempt of God; and so be highly *offensive and criminal*. To reject or deny what divine truth has been solemnly espoused by us, or in our name, must involve in still deeper scandal.

With you, my friend, no difference in principle, makes a man scandalous. "He may, you think, be very sincere in his views: he cannot force his conscience: if therefore his practice correspond, he has only God to answer to, for his sentiment." But softly, Sir, the apostolic synod declare them who taught, circumcision was necessary to salvation in the Christian church, *subverters of souls, and troublers of the church* (d). The inspired apostle reckons *heresies, among the works of the flesh*; which exclude from the kingdom of God (e). He or-

(a) Rom. iv. 25. 1 Cor. xv. 17. (b) Phil. iii. 16. Heb. iv. 14. and x. 26. 2 John 8. (c) Heb. x. 38. (d) Acts xv. 24. (e) Gal. v. 20. 21.



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(a) Rom. iv. 25. 1 Cor. xv. 17. (b) Phil. iii. 16. Heb. iv. 14. and x. 26. 2 John 8. (c) Heb. x. 38. (d) Acts xv. 24. (e) Gal. v. 20. 21.

22 *Of the government of the Christian church.*

ders every obstinate heretic to be expelled from the church (a). For blasphemous rejection of the doctrines of faith, he delivered Alexander and Hymeneus to Satan (b). He curses to eternal wo, the man that preaches another gospel, than of salvation through the imputed righteousness of Christ (c). For unwillingness to *bear them that are evil*; for *trying and condemning false apostles*, and *hating the deeds* of heretical men, are the rulers of the Asian churches commended; and such as held false opinions, or tolerate seducers, condemned (d). *He that abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, bath not God.* And if any *bring not this doctrine*, I am divinely charged, not to *receive him into my house, nor bid him God speed*; and warned that if I do, I render myself, a *partaker* with him, in *his evil deeds* (e). In vain, you tell me, of the man's sincerity; am I in God's stead to know his heart, and try his reins? Should he profess his candour; it is profession of Christianity, not of mere sincerity, that denominates one, a disciple of Christ. If given up to a *fear'd*, an *erring conscience*; what horrid sentiments and conduct may I not become *sincere* in! Was not Saul, the persecutor, abundantly *sincere* in opposing Christ, and wasting his church? He *verily thought he should* do so. Did not other persecutors *think*, their murder of the saints was a *doing God service* (f)? Did such sincerity qualify its subjects for admission to the sacred seals? What know I, but millions of Jews, Mahometans, and Heathens, may be sincere in their religious mode; inwardly reckoning it the best? Is it therefore not abominable and scandalous? What know I, how sincere a Socinian is, in denying the Godhead, and satisfaction of Christ; and almost every article of the Christian faith? How sincere an Anthropomorphite is, in believing his God corporeal, like part of himself? How sincere an Antinomian may be, in believing, that Christ died, that we might be delivered from the law as a rule; and so live as we list? Would profession of *sincerity* in such horrid blasphemy, entitle men to the distinguished privileges of

(a) Tit. iii. 10.  
ii. 2. 6. 12. 15. 20.  
John xvii. 2.

(c) 1 Tim. i. 20.  
(e) 2 John 8. 11.

(c) Gal. i. 8. 9.

(d) Rev.

(f) Acts xxvi. 9.



the children of Christ? Or would it excuse a man, that he hath provoked God to give him up to *strong delusions*, that he may believe lies? or that the corruption and pride of his heart hath so attached him to error, that he cannot conceive or believe, what God has plainly revealed in his word?

May not even the rejection of the plan of church-government, dictate by God in his sacred oracles, be it Presbyterian, Prelatic, or whatever it will, be so circumstantiate, as to render it criminally scandalous? If your servant, Amelius, contrary to your order, contrary to his promise and oath, and for his own gain, should sell off, or exchange for worse, your corns; your cattle; would you think, there was nothing in it? Would you still think, he was a good, honest, serious saint? Would you cheerfully admit him, as such, without any profession of repentance and resolution of amendment, to the Christian feast? Would you not rather say, Be his state as it will, he is a *scandalous, perjured thief*. And, Sir, are not the least truths and commands of God, relative to the discipline and government of his church, of as much importance, as your cattle, and corns? Hath not he expressly required me, to *buy the truth, and sell it not*; and to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints* (a)? Can there, then, be no sin; no scandal; in selling, in denying, and rejecting them, for my own carnal advantage; or in exchanging them for the inventions of men? If, by national covenant; by ordination vows; by solemn adherence to a confession of faith; I am engaged to maintain such divinely prescribed form of church-government; can I, without scandal, at once disobey my Maker, my Saviour; fraudulently sell, or exchange, his blood-ratified truths; and violate my solemn vow? If such as swear to their temporal hurt, upon changing, are excluded from the hill of God; ought these who change, when they swear to their profit and duty, to be cheerfully admitted?

Without knowledge of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith; no man can make any Christian confession. Without knowledge of these, his heart cannot

(a) Prov. xxiii. 23. Jude 3.

be good; he can have no hope, God will not have mercy on him; he cannot discern the Lord's body. If he partake of the holy banquet, he *eats and drinks damnation to himself*. He must not then be admitted (a). Indeed a person, weak in his intellects, but tender and circumspect in his life, may be admitted upon a smaller degree of knowledge, than one whose natural intellect is more vigorous, but his life less circumspect. The reason is; more of the powerful influence of gospel-truth, and less evidence of sloth, appear in the case of the former, than in that of the latter. In like manner, one educate in the Lutheran or Greek church, if sufficiently attested in life, might be occasionally admitted to partake with us, though ignorant of, or even prejudiced against some divine truths, not fundamental, which are publicly espoused by us. The reason is, his particular church has not, for ages past, enjoyed the same degree of light into some divine truths; nor made, precisely the same explicit espousal of them, as ours. He may, notwithstanding, *hold fast, whereunto he hath attained*; in which case, *him that is weak in the faith, receive ye, faith God, but not to doubtful disputations*.

But, how is the adult intrant to full communion with the Christian church, to profess his faith? Is a simple adherence to the scripture sufficient? Must he declare his adherence to some human creed or confession of faith? Or must he swear a certain form of covenant-bond? You, Amelius, extol the first, as entirely safe, and freeing the conscience from ecclesiastic tyranny. To me, it appears quite unsatisfactory. An idiot, or ignorant, may profess an adherence to the sacred text, while he knows nothing of its contents. It secures not against human imposition, unless the candidate restrict his adherence to the divine originals, in Hebrew and Greek; which few could either give, or receive, with judgment. Nor could even such adherence give any satisfaction; unless the candidate explained, in what sense he understood a multitude of particular texts. Socinians, Arians, Sabellians, Anthropomorphites, Pelagians, Arminians, Antinomians, having wrested the scripture, pretend an adhe-

(a) Prov. xix. 2. II. xxvii. 11. I Cor. x. 29.

rence to it, as the only rule of their faith and practice. Yet what a church; rather what a synagogue of Satan, would a mixed collection of them make? What peculiar doctrine of Christianity; what principle of natural or revealed religion, would not be overturned by some of the unite body?

To give a compendious view, of the leading points of the Christian religion, which lie dispersed in the sacred volumes; to represent the analogy of faith, and assist towards perusing the scripture with understanding; to exhibit the heavenly truths, in express opposition to damnable errors, sprung up in the church; to mark to the world, the common sentiments of a church, that they may join her with judgment; to point out to her members, what they ought to be well rooted and grounded in; and to promote her purity and peace; a sound CONFESSION is extremely useful and necessary. The divine Spirit approves it. He charges to hold fast the *form of sound words* (a). Few, or none, will dissent, but such as abhor restriction, from divulging their error with applause. So the thief hates the watchful cur, who alarms the family, to prevent the pillage of their house. But as every creed, every confession of faith, is of human composition; to deny the seals of God's covenant to a man, however circumstantiate, merely because he could not understand, or would not ignorantly approve, some particular phrase thereof, appears marked with tyranny over the conscience; and a thrusting of an human essay into the station of God's sacred word, whose rectitude and truth, I must believe, whether I understand it or not.

With respect to covenant-bonds, their express words being adopted, in a solemn appeal to the Most High; it is demonstrably evident, that, except they be so plain, as every one, admittable to the Lord's table, may understand them; except the things sworn to, or against, be so plainly commanded, or forbidden, in the heavenly oracles; as every, even the weakest Christian, may perceive it; to impose the swearing thereof, as a term of sacramental admission, would be highly criminal; would natively render the horrid sin of swearing without truth,

(a) 2 Tim. i. 13.



judgment, or righteousness, a frequent term of Christian fellowship, at the holy feast. How shocking the thought! Besides, public covenanting is, every where in scripture, represented as a voluntary, an occasional duty. At what hazard, then, should men turn it into a stated, ordinary term of admission, to the Lord's table? Would not this be, to behave as *lords over*, not as *servants in* God's house?

Moreover, how could a simple adherence to a creed or confession of faith; or the swearing of any human-formed covenant-bond, give proper security, concerning a man's faith, or obedience? He is perhaps quite ignorant of what he avows: or has subtlety enough to understand the phrases thereof, in a sense very different, from that avowed by the church. On the whole it plainly follows, that no man ought to be admitted to full communion with the visible church, without a thorough examination; in which he is called to mark his knowledge; confess his faith; and profess his resolution of obedience, in his own words. If hereon, it appear, he can, with understanding and candour, solemnly declare his adherence to a sound confession of faith; or swear a lawful covenant; the former is certainly ever agreeable; nor, in some cases, is the latter improper.

To state admission to the new-covenant seals, upon a clear foundation, you, Amelius, have oft insisted, That all saints, all that love our Lord Jesus, and have communion with him, are to be admitted, without any more ado. But my friend's habitual practice, long ago tempted me, to suspect him an unbeliever of that article of our creed, concerning the *HOLY catholic church, and communion of SAINTS*. It rather proves, you are for the *communion of all sinners*. Him that cometh unto you for admission, especially if endowed with worldly power and wealth, you in no wise cast out: persons brutishly ignorant; neglecters of the worship of God in secret, and in their family; profaners of God's name and Sabbath; habitual drunkards; and notorious whoremongers; you admit with the same marks of cheerfulness, as if the most circumspect saints. Contrary to your Master's precept, why do you *give that which is holy to dogs*? Why do not you *separate the precious from the vile*? Why do you

you not return, and discern between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not; that you may be his mouth to the people? Ah, what open enemies of Christ, you thus bid God speed, in going up to crucify him afresh, and *eat and drink damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body!* When you, Sir, whose lips should keep knowledge, by admitting to the sacred seals, multitudes of habitual and open transgressors, practically declare your hopes, they may be in covenant with God; all his children by faith in Christ Jesus; what numbers you harden in their sinful course, and state! In contradiction to your Master, how loud you proclaim, that *wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that miss it!* What numbers, just now in hell, curse you, for giving them prompt access to eat and drink their endless ruin!

Dropping these tremendous hints; to found a title of admission to these holy seals, upon real saintship, love to Christ, and communion with him, to me appears altogether absurd. How can these secret, these deep hidden things, be the foundation, the credentials, of admission to a public ordinance? These things always remain with every regenerate person. If they are the foundation of admission, we must welcome the saint to the sacred feast, though besotted with drink, as Noah; though defiled with incest, as Lot; just involved in murder, as David; wallowing in whoredom, as Solomon; or with curses and oaths denying his Master, as Peter. If you say, they must, before admission, repent of their scandals, your present sentiment is overturned; and admission founded not upon saintship, but on an outward profession, and conversation becoming the gospel.

Heartily I agree with our excellent Confession, "That  
 " all saints being united to one another in love, have  
 " communion in each other's gifts, and graces; and are  
 " obliged to the performance of such duties, as conduce  
 " to their MUTUAL GOOD. All saints by profession,  
 " are bound to maintain an HOLY FELLOWSHIP in the  
 " worship of God, and in performing such spiritual ser-  
 " vices, as tend to their MUTUAL EDIFICATION."  
 This sentiment, long uncontradicted in Britain, but chiefly the inspired oracle, that *all things are lawful,*  
 but

*but all things are not expedient ; all things are lawful, but all things edify not ; let all things be done to the use of edifying ; withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly (a) ; with such an one, no not to eat ;* if duly pondered, would dispose you to a more favourable view, of the demurring to admit to the holy seals, in some circumstances, persons we believe to be saints. Suppose, Sir, you reckoned the whole nation, yourself not excepted, deep sworn to oppose the abominations of Antichrist, would you cheerfully admit a Papist, whom you accounted a saint ? Would you esteem his resolute supporting of *the man of sin*, no degree of scandal ? Would your cheerful admission of him in his impenitency, conduce to convince him of the evil of Popery ? Rather, would it not confirm him in thinking well of it ; and thus render you a partaker in Babylon's sins and plagues ? Suppose you believed Presbyterian government founded on the word of God ; and the whole nation by solemn oath bound to maintain it : suppose you believed persons intruded into the pastoral function, climbed up some other way than by the door, and were spiritual *thieves and robbers* : suppose you esteemed such ministers, as are habitually indolent and unfaithful in what is good, but active and obstinate in overturning the cause of God, to be guilty of scandal ; would you reckon it no way offensive to condemn said government ; or obstinately to cleave to such a pastor, as a faithful minister ? Would you reckon the ready admission of him that did so, a means to convince him of his guilt ? If it did not, would it prove an holy and edifying fellowship to him ? Or if it hardened others in any thing sinful, tempting them to think contemptibly of some point of reformation, or favourably of some defection ; if, at the same time, it grieved some of the more circumspect in the congregation, in which he was admitted ; if too, he had open access and full freedom to receive the sacraments elsewhere ; could it conduce to an HOLY and EDIFYING fellowship, to admit him with you ? For the admission of one or two saints, who have full freedom and access elsewhere to receive these sacred

(a) 1 Cor. x. 23. and vi. 12. and xiv. 26. 2 Thess. iii. 6.  
1 Cor. v. 11.



seals, could it be expedient or holy, to harden some in their sin, to grieve the heart of others more tender, or to introduce disturbance into a congregation? To do this for the sake of one or two saints, who in some things live contrary to the laws of Heaven, and their own solemn vow, would it be *holy*, expedient, or edifying? Would it prove an holy and edifying fellowship, should you admit such to these sacred seals, whom, in case of the most notorious scandal, immediately after, you could do nothing to censure? If an indifferent practice, such as *eating of flesh*, is to be forborne, while the world standeth, if it make our brother offend; if by it, we grieve, we destroy our weak brother, for whom Christ died (a); how is it possible, he who does any thing, not commanded of God, which tends to stumble or grieve any of his fellow Christians, can be free of some degree of scandal; some sin against Christ? Suppose he be a saint, is not his disobedience to God, his cruelty to his brother, his disregard of the peace of the church, a considerable crime? Is he very worthy of the communion of saints, who in such cases, if he has a *faith* of liberty, does not at Christ's command *keep it to himself* (b)? On the whole, to me it appears, no term of Christian fellowship, not stated in scripture, is ever to be imposed; or can, without Popish usurpation of the power of Christ, and tyranny over the consciences of men: and that, especially in a broken state of the church, no small prudence is necessary to order her fellowship so, as may best promote the glory of God, and the holiness and edification of men.

## LETTER V.

**A**lready we have seen, there must be, there is, a particular government divinely institute in the Christian church; that Jesus Christ alone is her sovereign Head; that her members must be such as profess their faith and obedience to him, and their children. It is

(a) 1 Cor. viii. 11.--13. Rom. xiv. 13.--23. (b) Rom. xiv. 20.--23.

proper, Amelius, we next explore, what power and privileges are divinely conferred on her; and to whom.

That all ecclesiastic power and authority is, by our adored Redeemer, bestowed, for the advantage of his whole church, no member excepted, is clearly marked in the sacred volumes. For *edification*; for building her up on him, her sole foundation; for *bringing* her members *to the stature of his fulness*, are apostles, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and every other officer, therein appointed (a). Their power is given them for *edification*, not for *destruction*; they have no power against the truth, but for the truth (b). For edification, is every one of her ordinances calculate. The word read and preached, is to *turn men from darkness to light; from the power of Satan to God; that by faith they may receive remission of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified* (c). The sacraments are to *seal up men to the day of redemption* (d). Offenders are to be admonished, that they may be *gained* from their sin and danger to the Lord; are to be *rebuked*, that others may fear to do wickedly; and that wavering minds may be *sound in the faith* (e). Obstinate transgressors are to be excommunicate, that their flesh, their corruption, may be destroyed; and their spirit or soul saved in the day of the Lord; and the church preserved from defilement (f). Penitents are to be absolved, that they be not *swallowed up of overmuch sorrow* (g). These ordinances, all of them, are therefore invaluable privileges purchased with a Saviour's blood; and given to the church: to them, each of her members, as need requires, has an undoubted right. Every member has a right to perform the duties of prayer, reading the word of God, meditation, private reproof, and the like. He has a right to try the doctrine and practice of teachers, that he may not believe every spirit (h): a right to prove what he reads or hears, by the word of God, that he may *hold fast that which is good* (i). Every member, adult and blameless, has a

(a) Eph. iv. 11.---13. (b) 2 Cor. xiii. 8. 10. (c) Acts  
 xxvi. 17. 18. (d) 1 Pet. iii. 21. (e) Matth. xviii. 15.---18.  
 1 Tim. v. 20. Tit. i. 9. (f) 1 Cor. v. 5. 7. 13. (g) 2 Cor.  
 ii. 7. (h) 1 John iv. 1. (i) Acts xvii. 11. 1 Thess. v. 21.  
 power

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power to chuse the church-officers who are immediately to rule over him; and thus mark out the person, he judges proper to sustain power of office from Christ, to govern him (a).

Is therefore the power of authority lodged in the community or general body of the faithful, separate from, or connected with church-officers? It is not. No such power was given them by Christ, while on earth. If it had, the apostles should have derived their power from the people; the founders of the Christian church should have been consequential to, and empowered by her. Contrary to a multiplicity of scriptures, they had been *the apostles of men*, not of Jesus Christ (b). That no such power was lodged in the people, after the apostles received their mission, is no less manifest. Church-officers were still divinely termed the *ambassadors, stewards, ministers* of Christ (c). They are marked to derive their office immediately from him; never from the people. Christ, not the people, is marked to GIVE them; marked to SET them in the church, to *make them overseers* (d). In his, not the peoples name, they are commanded to act. To HIM, not to the people, must they, at last, *give an account* (e).

No where does the sacred page represent the Christian people, as possessed of, or warranted to exercise any office-power in the church. Not they, but her pastors, have power to preach the gospel: for *how*, saith God, *shall they preach, except they be sent?* except they be *called of God* from among their brethren, *as was Aaron* (f)? Not the people, but their pastors, have power to administer the sacraments, these mysteries of God. This is connected with preaching (g). Not the private members of the church, but her officers, are divinely warranted to ordain others, presbyters, or deacons. Timothy was ordained, not by the people, but by the *laying on of the hands of the presbytery*. Elders in the

(a) Acts i. 15.---26. and vi. 2.---5. and xiv. 23. (b) Gal. i. 1. Matth. xxviii. 18.---20. John xx. 21.---23. Luke vi. 13. Mark xvi. 15. (c) 2 Cor. v. 19. 20. 1 Cor. iv. 1. 2. (d) Eph. iv. 8.---11. 1 Cor. xii. 28. Acts xx. 28. 29. (e) Matth. xviii. 19. Heb. xiii. 17. 18. (f) Rom. x. 15. Heb. v. 4. 5. (g) 1 Cor. iv. 1. Mark xvi. 15. 16.



church were ordained, not by the people, but by Paul and Barnabas. Deacons were ordained, not by the multitude of believers, but by the apostles. To ordain presbyters and deacons, were Timothy and Titus left in places, or sent long journeys (*a*). How absurd this, if the multitude of believers could have done it themselves! Not the people, but their church-officers, are divinely marked, and required, to censure the scandalous, or absolve the penitent. To the apostles, and their successors, it was given, to *bind and to loose the offenders* (*b*). The excommunication of the incestuous Corinthian, was inflicted, not by the ALL, but by the MANY, or the CHIEF ONES, the rulers, as the original word signifies. Paul the apostle, delivered Alexander and Hymeneus to Satan. Titus the evangelist, not the people, is empowered to reject, or excommunicate, the obstinate heretic (*c*).

No where in scripture, are the gifts necessary for ecclesiastic office, promised, or marked as given, to the whole body of the faithful. Experience shews, how many of them are destitute thereof: how *few apt to teach*: how *few able rightly to divide the word of truth*, and to *convince gainsayers*: how *few capable to try the learning of ministers*; or to *try false apostles*, and *find them liars*. Scripture and experience shew, these gifts are promised to, and bestowed upon the officers of the church. To these Jesus hath promised his presence, to assist them in baptizing, and in teaching his laws, *till the end of the world*. The discipline of these, enacted on earth, if just, he hath promised to ratify in heaven. To these he hath intimate a mission, and bid *receive the Holy Ghost*, to furnish them for their work (*d*).

No where in scripture, is the body of the Christian people marked by such characters, as import authority lodged in them. Never are they stiled *pastors*, *elders*, *overseers*, *rulers*, *guides*, *governments*, &c. Instead hereof, they are characterized as the *flock*, watched over

(*a*) 1 Tim. iv. 14. Acts xiv. 23. and vi. 3. 6. Tit. i. 1 Tim. iii. and v. 22. (*b*) Matth. xviii. 18. and xvi. 19. (*c*) 1 Cor. v. 4. 2 Cor. ii. 6. 1 Tim. i. 20. Tit. iii. 10. (*d*) Matth. xxviii. 19. 20. and xviii. 19. John xx. 21---23. 1 Cor. xii. 8. 9. 1 Tim. iii. 5.

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and fed; the *family* overseen; the *body* governed; the persons *subject* in the Lord: and solemnly are they charged to *know, honour, obey, and submit* to their shepherds, overseers, governors, guides (a).

What shocking absurdity should the lodging of all church-power in the community of the faithful produce! All should be rulers; none remain to be ruled. Rulers should have rule; and yet over nothing at all. Thus, the church, herself, becomes steward of the mysteries of God; and none is left, to whom they can be dispensed. If saintship, mystical union with Christ, is the channel of receiving this power; children, who know not their right hand from the left; women, who are divinely discharged to *speak in the church*; must have from Christ, a power equal with any, to rule in her; and to dispense the ordinances of the gospel; for children and women may be as truly saints as others; in Christ there is neither *male, nor female*. Or should all the Christian people, but adult males, be excluded from rule; the power is no more lodged in the community of the faithful, but in a representative church of adult males. And what then shall be the channel of conveying this power to the adult males? Where is the sacred oracle affirming, that adult manhood gives one a peculiar relation to Christ, or his church? Should I add, into what incurable disorder and division, shall lodging of all church-power in the people, throw the followers of Christ? How shall they, either neglect government, or be drawn off from their business, to judge of what is above their reach? women and children to try and ordain pastors; to try subtle heretics; and, if obstinate, cast them out of the church? If the Christian people of *every congregation*, possess a fulness of this power; how absurdly doth the infallible Spirit represent all Christians, as *ONE BODY*, whose members depend one upon another; as a *CITY* or *CAMP*, whose parts are mutually connected and dependent? What a wide door is this opened for; what safety secured to, subtle blasphemers, crafty heretics? Should the erroneous deceiver decoy the greater part of

(1) Acts xx. 28. 1 Thess. v. 12. 1 Tim. v. 17. Heb. xii. 7. 17. 22.

his hearers to his side; how shall the residue repress him? how shall they cast him out of the church? If the pastor, elders, or deacons, fall into error, or scandal; how improper, that none should be their judges, their correctors, but their spiritual pupils and children; these, perhaps, mostly infected, or biassed? What hope of reformation here! Again, suppose a whole congregation, though but of eight or ten persons, fall into grievous error, or scandal; there is no ecclesiastic means left to reclaim them. They are totally independent, on all the rest of the Christian world. Enquire, my friend, into the case of the English independent churches in Scotland; and see such confusions as these, verified in experience, to such noted degrees, as may give us an everlasting disgust of the scheme.

## L E T T E R VI.

**T**HAT the civil magistrate is the vicegerent of God, in the government of every thing civil, inspiration affirms: that he should be the slave of church-rulers, obliged implicitly to ratify their decisions, antichrist, not scripture or reason, allows. Whatever authority, Aza, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, exercised towards the Jewish; the same may he, in every age, exercise, with respect to the Christian church. As a *nursing father*, a *minister of God*, he is empowered to protect, patronize, and encourage her; that her members may *live quietly, in all godliness and honesty*. By the exercise of his civil power in her favour, he is to prevent, or abolish, persecution, profaneness, idolatry, superstition, heresy; and whatever else tends to the external hindrance of the pure worship of God (a). He is to maintain for her, her fulness of spiritual privileges granted by Christ: is to promote the public administration of, and proper attendance on, every ordinance of the

(a) 1<sup>st</sup> Is. xlix. 23. and lx. ro. 16. Rom. xiii. 3. 4. 1 Tim. ii. 2. 2 Chron. xv. 8. 16. and xvii. 3. 10. and xxii. 1. and xxxiii. 15. 2 Kings xviii. 4. and xxiii.



glorious gospel. He is to supply with PLACES, for that end; and with maintenance, for *pastors and teachers* (a). To regulate the external affairs of the church, in a political or civil manner, is his undoubted province. In this method, he is empowered to reform her corruptions in doctrine, worship, discipline, or government: for this end he may indict and call synods of church-officers, to settle, and govern her matters, according to the word of God (b). As head of a civil family, he may appoint public fasts and thanksgivings, as the circumstances of his dominions require (c). With his civil authority, he ought to enforce the laws of Christ; and such ecclesiastic statutes of church-officers, as he finds warranted thereby. By it he may compel her rulers and members, to an external performance of their duty: and is to punish every gross and open violation of the divine law, *unto death, or to banishment, or to imprisonment, or to confiscation of goods, &c.* (d). This power of the magistrate, about the affairs of the Christian church, is that of a *nursing father*, to help; not to hurt her, to add to, or confirm, her privileges disposed to her by Christ; not to intrench on, or bereave her thereof. It is to be exercised in a civil manner over church-members, as belonging to the state; not in a spiritual, or over them as they are members of the mystical body of Christ (e).

That no magistrate, as such, has any spiritual power or authority, over the Christian church, shines with abundant evidence in the sacred word. Not to the magi-

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(b) Exod. xxxii. Josh. xxiv. 2 Kings xviii. and xxiii. 2 Chron. xv. xvii. xix. &c. chap. (c) 1 Sam. vii. 6. 2 Chron. xx. 3. Ezra viii. 21. Jer. xxxvi. 6. Jon. iii. 7. (d) 2 Chron. xv. xxxiv. and xxxv. chap. Neh. xiii. Dan. iii. 28. 29. and vi. 26. 27. 2 Chron. xxix. 5. 24. and xxx. 1. 2 Kings xviii. 6. Deut. xvii. 18.--20. 1 Kings ii. 26. 27. Ezra vii. 26. 27. Deut. xxi. 8.--21. Gen. ix. 6. Numb. xxxv. 30.--34. Job xxxi. 9. 11. Lev. xx. 11.--25. Exod. xxii. 1.--15. Deut. xix. 16. and xiii. 1.--6. and xvii. 1.--8. Lev. xvii. 2.--8. 2 Chron. xv. 13. 16. Job xxxi. 26.--28. Lev. xxiv. 15. 16. Dan. iii. 29. Numb. xv. 30.--36. Rom. xiii. 3. 4. 1 Pet. ii. 13. 14. Heb. x. 28. (e) 1s. xlix. 23. 1 Tim. ii. 2. Rom. xiii. 4.

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strate; but to his apostles, and their successors, Jesus gave the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*; the power of ecclesiastic order and government (*a*). Nor was then, any civil prince, to whom they could be given. Not to the *Jewish*; who were violent persecutors of Christ and his cause; and from whom the sceptre was just departing: not to the *Heathen*; who were not members of his church; but open enemies to him and his interest: not to the *Christian*; who had no existence, till hundreds of years after.

For various ages, while magistrates continued heathens and bloody persecutors, was the whole power of the Christian church exercised. The word was publicly read and preached; the sacraments dispensed; the unruly admonished; the scandalous rebuked; the obstinate transgressors excommunicate; the penitent absolved; presbyters and deacons ordained; synods convened; and ecclesiastic decrees enacted (*b*). Can my Amelius instruct, that the apostles, evangelists, and primitive presbyters, herein usurped the magistratical power? Or can he document, that, since their death, the power they divinely received, was transferred to the magistrate? No, it is too absurd to attempt.

As such, the magistrate is no church-officer at all. No where I find him in the sacred list of her rulers (*c*). Being a woman or child, he may be incapable of ecclesiastic authority (*d*). Being an Heathen, he may not be so much as a member: *without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world*; not subject to our Mediator as such, not interested in his *kingdom*, which is *not of this world* (*e*). Is this, my friend, a proper HEAD for the Christian church?

Nor is church-government dependent on, but co-ordinate with the civil; the church having as full power in herself to regulate her affairs, as the state has to regulate

(*a*) Matth. xvi. 19. and xviii. 18. and xxviii. 18.--20. John xx. 21.--23. (*b*) Acts iv. 2. 1 Tim. iii. 16. Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xi. 17.--28. Acts ii. 41. 42. and viii. 12. Acts xiii. 1.--3. and xiv. 23. 1 Tim. iv. 14. Tit. i. 5. Acts vi. 1.--6. 1 Tim. v. 20. 1 Cor. v. 1 Tim. i. 20. 2 Cor. ii. 6.--8. Acts xv. and xvi. 4. (*c*) Rom. xii. 6--8. 1 Cor. xii. 28. Eph. iv. 1. (*d*) 1 Cor. xiv. 34. (*e*) Eph. ii. 12.

hers, independent of the church. The officers of the church are *set over* her, not by the state; but by the *Holy Ghost*: they are the ministers, not of the state; but of *Christ*: and are over private Christians *in the Lord* (a). They are appointed to preach; dispense sacraments and censures, &c. Which kings themselves have no warrant to perform (b). They are divinely commanded to execute their office, without waiting the magistrate's consent; nay, suppose he forbid, threaten, and punish for the same (c). To appeal from them, to him, as superior judge, there is no shadow of warrant: the *priests lips should keep knowledge, and we are to receive the law at his mouth*: in his sentence, next to that of Jesus himself, we must acquiesce: *the spirits even of the prophets must be subject to the prophets* (d). Nay, if the highest magistrate prove a disorderly member of the church; her officers may withstand and censure him. If he is obstinate in wickedness; they may deliver him to Satan (e).

In many respects, church power and authority is altogether different, from the civil vested in the magistrate: they differ in their object; their source; their matter; their manner; their end. The church, the object of the former, is very different from the commonwealth, the object of the latter. She is Christ's body and spouse; not that of the magistrate (f). Her officers are appointed, chosen, and ordained by direction, and are the *stewards* and *ambassadors*, of Christ, not of the magistrate (g): and set up, not for civil; but spiritual ends, of preaching, praying, giving and receiving the sacraments, &c. To confound the church and state, is to give Jesus the lie, who said, *My kingdom is not of this world* (h), as every state is. It is to infer, that where is no church, there can be no commonwealth: that

(a) Acts xx. 28. 1 Cor. iv. 1. 2. 1 Thess. v. 12. (b) Rom. x. 15. 2 Chron. xxvi. 18. 19. (c) Acts iv. 19. 20. 1 Cor. v. 5. Matth. xviii. 17. Tit. iii. 10. (d) Mal. ii. 7. Deut. xvii. 8.---10. 1 Cor. xiv. 32. Acts xv. and xvi. 4. (e) 2 Thess. iii. 6. Matth. xviii. 15.---18. (f) Eph. i. 22. and v. 25. (g) Eph. iv. 8.---11. 1 Cor. xii. 28. Acts vi. 3. 4. and xiii. 1.---4. and xiv. 23. 1 Tim. iv. 14. 1 Cor. iv. 1. 2 Cor. v. 20. (h) John xviii. 36.

every member of a commonwealth, Mahometan, or Pagan, is a member of the Christian church, and a disciple of Christ: that every officer of the church, by virtue of his office, is an officer of the state. How glaring the absurdity, the contradiction to scripture (a)! In its general nature, civil government flows from, and is *ordained of God*, as the FORMER, the RULER of men; and the particular frame and offices thereof, are an *ordinance of men* (b). In its whole form and offices, the ecclesiastical flows from, and is appointed by Jesus Christ, as the mediatorial head of his church (c). The authority of the magistrate is that of making civil statutes; of rewarding with temporal rewards; and of inflicting even on penitent transgressors, corporeal punishments; fines, imprisonment, exile, death, &c.; and it may lawfully reside in the people; or in one person, man, woman, child, Heathen: and extends to Jews, Mahometans, Heathens. Church-power is that of preaching the gospel; dispensing the sacraments; infliction of spiritual and medicinal censures; always absolving the penitent. It cannot be lodged, in the people; in a single person; in a woman; a child, or Heathen: and respects only such as are within the church (d). In the exercise of civil power, we judge according to laws human, as well as divine; can enact new statutes; employ only temporal rewards and punishments; act as, or in the name of, supreme magistrates; and often by delegates. In the exercise of church-power, we must judge only according to the spiritual rule of God's word; can enact no new laws; must employ only such encouragements and discipline as affect the conscience; must act solely in the name of Christ; cannot delegate our power to another (e). Nor, witness yon rejection of Saul, and leprosy of Uzziah, can the augustest monarch on earth, without infinite hazard, usurp the exercise thereof (f). The immediate end of

(a) Jer. xxvii. 12. Rom. xiii. 1.---3. Eph. ii. 12. 2 Tim. ii. 4. and iv. 2. 1 Tim. iv. 13.---15. 2 Cor. ii. 16. Acts vi. 2. 4. Luke xii. 13. 14. (b) Rom. xiii. 1. 2. 4. 1 Pet. ii. 13.

(c) Matth. xvi. 19. and xxviii. 18.---20. Eph. iv. 11. 12. 1 Cor. xii. 28. (d) 2 Cor. x. 4. 5. Heb. xiii. 17. 22. 2 Thess. ii. 3. 4.

3 John 9. 10. 1 Tim. iii. 5. 1 Cor. xiv. 34. 35. and xii. 28. and v. 13. 2 Cor. x. 8. (e) Matth. xxviii. 18.---20. Acts iv. 17.

1 Cor. v. 4. (f) 1 Sam. xiii. 9.---15. 2 Chron. xxvi. 16.---22.



civil government, is the *outward* welfare of all the members of the commonwealth. The immediate end of the ecclesiastic, is the *spiritual* advantage of human souls; chiefly these who belong to Christ's body the church. The powers being so different, it cannot but follow, that the magistrate, *as such*, is invested with no spiritual power, far less with a supremacy in the Christian church: and to claim it, must be as truly Antichristian, as that of the Romish pope.

Imagine not, Amelius, that these sentiments detract from the civil authority. No; every minister of Christ is charged to teach his hearers to obey the magistrate, in every thing lawful; not for fear of external punishment; but for *conscience sake*. These instructions he must enforce with the authority of God; the example and love of Christ; the horrors of damnation to the disobedient; the joys of heaven to these who conscientiously comply. He is charged to inflict discipline to the highest on these, who *despise dominions, and speak evil of dignities* (a). None of Jesus' ordinances interfere with the civil interests of men. They are calculate to make us live soberly, righteously, and godly: to instigate us to *fear God*; *honour the king*; give *honour to whom honour is due*; *custom to whom custom*; *owing no man any thing, but to love one another*; to *love our neighbour as ourselves*; and *do good to them that hate us* (b). How effectual this, to promote the peace, wealth, and honour of a nation! Even the censures of the church, affect nothing, which falls under the cognizance of human law. The person admonished or excommunicate, is thereby not a whit poorer, weaker, idler, unrulier, &c. respecting the affairs of this world, than before. Where, my friend, can you mark more faithful subjects, than these, who believed Christ to be the only head of the church; who hath therein appointed a government distinct from the civil magistrate? Amid the rebellions and disorders unnumbered in the Romish empire, from Tiberius to Constantine the Great, for about 300 years, did ever the Christians grievously provoked, cruelly oppressed, raise

(a) Rom. xiii. 1.--4. 1 Tim. ii. 1. 2. Jude 8.--14. (b) Tit. ii. 11. 12. 1 Pet. iii. 17. Rom. xiii. 8. Matth. v.

one? No, except outrageous tyranny obliged to self-defence. Did ever the Waldenses, the Bohemian brethren, the French Protestants, or British Presbyterians, take arms against their sovereign? No; that some of an opposite sentiment, have done otherwise, the annals of our British sovereigns attest.

## L E T T E R VII.

**H**AS our adored Master intrusted the government of his Christian church, to diocesan BISHOPS, superior to teaching presbyters? These, my friend has often told me, "are expressly mentioned in the sacred page; their office established on the pattern of the Hebrew high priest. They succeed to the twelve apostles, as presbyters do to the SEVENTY. James the less, was bishop at Jerusalem; Timothy at Ephesus; Titus at Crete. The seven angels of the Asian churches, mentioned in the apocalyptic vision, and epistles, were their diocesan prelates. The whole current of orthodox fathers in the Christian church, join to support the office." But, knows not my dear Amelius, that the sagacious Usher, the learned Stillingfleet, the famed Dodwel, with almost every abler author of the Prelatic persuasion, readily grant the office of diocesan BISHOP to have no foundation in scripture? Knows he not, that till this moment, the English parliament would never establish Prelacy, *as founded on the oracles of truth*? Knows he not the mournful plight of our Episcopalian brethren, between these of the Presbyterian and Popish persuasion? If, on church-government and discipline, they dispute with the *former*; they are unmercifully drubbed with the arguments, themselves had used against the *latter*. If they dispute with *these*, they are mauled with the very arguments, they had used against those. Intestine war too, rages in all their borders. Scarce a text, scarce an argument, is produced, in favours of Prelacy, but their principal writers are by the ears about it; Dodwel against Hammond; the critical Whitby against the zealot Pair: the more judicious Stillingfleet,

lingfleet, and his brethren Whitaker, Whitgift, Bilson, &c. against all the three. To refute what has been hinted in favour of the Prelatic office; no more would be necessary, than a rehearsal of what its supporters have published. But, this apart, for present reply.

BISHOPS are indeed mentioned in our authorised translation of the oracles of God. The name, however, of itself, imports no lordly rule. It signifies no more than OVERSEER, as every presbyter is to his flock. Some, if not most, of the framers of our last translation, hearty friends to the Episcopal cause, were fond to find any thing resembling its stuff. In the very house of Baal, they happily found VESTRY and VESTMENTS (a). The bishops, who revised the work, were equally zealous for their own honour. They altered fourteen places of the New Testament version, to make it speak in a more Episcopalian strain. Where the word EPISCOPOS was found; if the rendering it bishop, seemed to support the Prelatic cause; it was done (b). Where it seemed to do hurt, they translated it OVERSEERS (c). EPISCOPE, which they render bishopric, signifies just THE OFFICE OF AN OVERSEER (d); and by themselves, it is translated VISITATION (e).

In vain you mentioned the pattern of the Hebrew high priest. His office was wholly typical (f). Christ, the great *high priest of our profession*, long ago came in his stead, and abolished the typical office, by the death of his cross (g). After this, to argue from the Hebrew high priesthood, in the manner you do, is to seduce us from the amiable Jesus, to Moses and his fiery law; to Moses and his burdensome yoke. Nor will the argument avail; unless you instruct, that the officers of the Christian church enter their function by lineal succession; unless you fix his HOLINESS, or some other universal bishop, or high priest, at their head; unless sacrifices, altars, and sacred mansions, be restored to their ancient form.

Nor, till after the Saviour's resurrection, was any Christian church formed on earth. Till then, he and his missionaries preached, not that the *kingdom of God*,

(a) 2 Kings x. 22. (b) Phil. i. 1. 1 Tim. iii. 2. Tit. i. 7.  
(c) Acts xx. 28. (d) Acts i. 20. (e) Luke xix. 44. 1 Pet.  
ii. 12. (f) Heb. x. 1. (g) Col. ii. 14.



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the Christian dispensation was come; but that it *was at hand* (a). Till then, the sacred mission of the *twelve* was therefore no less temporary, than that of the *seventy*. In mission, in success, where lies the preference of the one to the other, in what errand they went, *before the Saviour's death*? The seventy had an immediate mission from Christ. They appear solely subjected to him. They had power given them to preach the gospel; to heal the diseased; to cast out devils. They had distinguished success. In their mission, what more had the twelve (b)? When, after his resurrection, the twelve received their mission for life, they were vested with an extraordinary function; wherein they can have no successor. An immediate call from Christ; a commission extending equally to every nation; authority to found, and equally govern every church; an infallibility in teaching; a constant power to work miracles; to speak with tongues unlearned; and to confer the miraculous influence of the Holy Ghost, distinguished their character (c). Where is the diocesan prelate, his Holiness not excepted, that brings such credentials? If there is none, why an absurd pretence, to succeed the apostles in their superior office?

Was James diocesan of Jerusalem? I desiderate the proof. What author, that lived within 200 or 300 year of his death, says any thing coming up to the point? He much resided at Jerusalem. What then? He there directed the church. What proves this? That he threw off his apostolate, his general charge; and degraded himself into a diocesan, who has the charge of no more than a particular province? Nothing more absurd.

The Episcopal power of Timothy and Titus, you no doubt found on their ordination of presbyters or bishops; and the postscripts to their epistles. These postscripts are of no weight; are of no divine authority; but were added, at least in their present form, ages after their death, by some bold impostor. That neither of the two were diocesan bishops any where, is clearly marked in

(a) Matth. iv. 17. and x. 7. Luke xxi. 31. and xxii. 16. 18.

(b) Matth. x. Luke x. 1. -- 22. (c) Mark xvi. 15. -- 20. John xx. 21. -- 23. Acts throughout.

the true sayings of God. There we find, that both were evangelists, who, at the direction of the inspired Paul, travelled along with him; or were sent by him, to plant, or water churches; and to ordain officers therein. When he wrote his epistles to the Thessalonians, Romans, Hebrews, Colossians, Philippians, and 2d to the Corinthians, Timothy was with him; and ordinarily, along with him, salutes the churches. He was sent to Corinth: charged to abide still at Ephesus: was afterward in Italy: at least was intended to be sent to Philippi: and was called to Rome (a). Titus was Paul's PARTNER; attendant to him at Jerusalem. With grief he missed him at Troas; he was sent to Corinth; left at Crete; called to Nicopolis; departed to Dalmatia (b). In constitute churches, it doth not appear, that even apostles had the least superiority in government, to an ordinary pastor. A presbytery established at Lystra, Paul finding Timothy there: by laying on of his own hands, he conferred the Holy Ghost: to ordain him an evangelist he required the *laying on of the hands of the presbytery* along with himself. Is it, my friend, for the honour of most diocesans, to claim these two evangelists for their pattern? Like them, are they ordained by a *presbytery*? Give they themselves *wholly* to the ministerial work, *preaching in season, and out of season*? Carefully *keep* they the gospel trust *committed* to them? Conscientiously *commit* they the ministry to *faithful men*? Avoid they rash ordination of church-officers? Without partiality, rebuke they before all, the notorious sinner (c)? No; but the very reverse.

Where, in the infallible oracles of God, is the remotest hint, the angels of the seven Asian churches were diocesan bishops? The character ANGEL is given to any messenger of God, created or divine (d). Sometimes

(a) 1 Thess. i. 1. 2 Thess. i. 1. Rom. xvi. 21. Heb. xiii. 23. Col. i. 1. Phil. ii. 19. 2 Cor. i. 1. 1 Cor. iv. 17. and xvi. 10. 2 Cor. i. 19. and iii. 2. 6. 1 Tim. i. 3. Heb. xiii. 23. Phil. ii. 19. 2 Tim. iv. 9. 12. (b) Gal. ii. 1. 3. 2 Cor. ii. 13. and vii. 6. 7. 16. 23. and xii. 18. Tit. iii. 12. 2 Tim. iv. 10. (c) 1 Tim. iv. 14. and iv. 14.--15. 2 Tim. ii. 4. and iv. 2. 1 Tim. vi. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 2. 1 Tim. v. 20.--22. (d) Hag. i. 13. Mal. ii. 7. Matth. xi. 10.

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it signifies a number of persons; one put for many: it even signifies a number of ministers, they being *ONE* in their common work and design (*a*). When Paul planted the church of Ephesus, he left a number of presbyters there; but no hint of a superior BISHOP: nay, he calls each of these presbyters, a BISHOP or overseer, constitute such by *the Holy Ghost* (*b*). Jesus, the divine walker amid these churches, addresses the angel of Smyrna, as a plurality of persons; *Fear none of these things, which thou shalt suffer; the devil shall cast some of YOU into prison, that YE may be tried; and YE shall have tribulation ten days.* The angel of Pergamos, the angel of Thyatira, is addressed in the same plural terms (*c*). Shews not this plainly, that these *angels*, instead of diocessans, were unite bodies of presbyters; MANY in person, ONE in office and work?

For about 250 years after the death of most of the apostles, we have nothing but a few broken shreds of church-history, that deserve our credit. Providence left this period a kind of dark chaos, that we might rest solely on his infallible word. Then the most aged pastors in a place, especially if he presided in their judicatures, was often, by way of eminence, called BISHOP: but till, in the 4th century, Constantine's sword overthrew the Heathen abominations; and his well-designed, but extravagant favour to the clergy, almost overturned Christianity; I defy my friend, to document the existence of spiritual lords. Afterward, indeed, ambitious minds rested not to heap spiritual dignities, one over another; till the cope-stone was laid in his Holiness' claim, to universal, to infallible headship, over the whole Christian church. Nay, suppose you could prove, that in the very year next to that of the apostles, Prelacy prevailed in every church: no more would follow, but that numbers, who, like Diotrephes, *loved the pre-eminence*, had quickly gained their point; and changed the statutes of Heaven. Where is the impossibility of that? Who remembers not, how suddenly the Hebrew

(*a*) Psal. xxiv. 7. Dan. viii. 3. 20. Zech. i. 18.—21. Rev. viii. 13. and xiv. 6. 8. 9. (*b*) Acts xx. 17.—28. (*c*) Rev. ii. 10. 13. 24.



race, at Sinai's foot, awfully, divinely warned to the contrary, changed the worship of the true God, into that of a *golden calf* (a)? That all the Christian fathers allow Prelacy to have warrant in the sacred word, is not yet proven. Clemens Romanus, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Ireneus, Tertullian, Clemens, Alexandrinus, Origen, Cyprian, Basil the Great, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, Theodoret, Primasius, Jedulus, Theophylact, Oecumenius, and others; chiefly Jerome, whose extensive learning and judgment was scarce matched by any or all of his companions, declare themselves on the opposite side. Suppose they had been all for his lordship's claim; my conscience could not be moved. The fathers were fallible men. like myself: my faith ought not to stand in their wisdom; but in the authority and power of God: their writings which have reached my time, either by original mistake, or after corruption of men, dishonest, designing, are too thick sown with palpable blunders, to merit my distinguished regard. In vain, I have heard of their miracles. The story is oft so foolish, and trifling; that my unbiassed reason rejects it with contempt. Nothing wondrous appears true, but what I find matched, if not more, by some Prelacy-hater, in the British church.

The fallible, the oft mistaken fathers apart, let the unerring oracles of Heaven decide the point. Among his ministers, Jesus prohibits, peremptorily prohibits, the very least degree of lordly dominion. *Ye know*, said he to his apostles, *that the princes of the Gentiles EXERCISE DOMINION over them; and they, that are great, EXERCISE AUTHORITY upon them; but it shall not be so among you* (b). By the Greek interpreters of the Old Testament, the word here rendered to EXERCISE DOMINION is used to signify Adam's divinely warranted rule over the inferior creation, and Christ's government in his mediatory office (c); where it is impossible the remotest idea of *tyranny* can be included. In the parallel text, Luke useth a term, never pretended to import *violence or tyranny*. Lordly dominion itself, not the tyrannic exercise of it, must therefore be here,

(a) Exod. xxxii. Psal. cvii. 21. (b) Matth. xx. 25. 26.  
 Luke xxii. 25. 26. (c) Gen. i. 28. Psal. lxxii. 8. and cx. 2.

by our Saviour, prohibited. To refuse this, is to pervert the original term of the holy One; is to reproach the mother of Zebedee's children as guilty of begging the adored Jesus should grant her children authority to exercise *tyranny and violence*; is to calumniate him as guilty of falsehood, representing every ruler of the Gentiles a tyrannic oppressor of mankind. In imitation of their blessed Master, and inspired of God, Zebedee's son condemns and threatens Diotrophes, for *loving*, and pushing for, *the prebeminence*; solemnly Peter, his fellow apostle, prohibits church-officers, to behave *as lords over God's heritage* (a).

The sameness of bishops and presbyters is brightly marked in the sacred page. Departing from Ephesus, Paul convened the ELDERS, *presbyters*, of that church, and charged them to feed the flock, over which the Holy Ghost had made them EPISCOPOUS, *overseers*, bishops (b). *To the saints at Philippi with EPISCOPOIS*, the *bishops*, *overseers*, and *deacons*, he directs his epistles (c). Bishops and deacons are marked for the only settled governors of the Philippian church: the former must therefore, as at Ephesus, be the presbyters, elders, which the Holy Ghost had made *bishops*, *overseers*, over that Christian flock. Here are bishops without presbyters under them. Here is a number of bishops in one city, not very considerable; how agrees this to their being diocesan lords? Not in the least. To pretend Epaphroditus was bishop or archbishop at Philippi, because that church sent him as their servant, with a supply of money to the apostle's necessity, is such absurd foolery, as merits no answer. Can none but a bishop bear money from one place to another? Or is none but he fit to be trusted with it? Nor can the bishop mentioned by Paul to Timothy be a diocesan lord. No officer, but the deacon, is marked as inferior to him. He must *be apt to teach*; an endowment not presently necessary for a diocesan prelate (d). Paul appoints Titus to ordain ELDERS, PRESBYTERS, in every city of Crete; persons of good report: *For*, saith he, *a BISHOP must be*

(a) 3 John 9. 1 Pet. v. 3.  
2. 1. d) 1 Tim. iii. 3.

(b) Acts xx. 17. 28.

(c) Phil.

*blameleſs as the ſteward of God (a).* What ſenſe, my friend, is in this reaſon, in this mention of BISHOP, unleſs he be the ſame with the ELDER, preſbyter, in the preceding verſe? The inſpired Peter charges ELDERS, preſbyters, to feed the flock of God, EPISCOPOUNTES exerciſing the office of biſhop, *taking the overſight* thereof. Is Judas marked to have had a BISHOPRIC, a charge of overſight; two not inferior apoſtles, characterize themſelves ELDERS, preſbyters (b).

What the dioceſan biſhop claims as his diſtinguiſhing prerogative, the power of ordaining paſtors and teachers; the ſtatutes of God lodge in the hand of no one ſtanding officer of the church; but in the PRESBYTERY, the college of elders, teaching and ruling. By the laying on of Paul's hand, Timothy received the Holy Ghoſt: but by *the laying on of the hands of the preſbytery*, he was ſet apart to his office (c). In vain were I told, the preſbytery ſignifies PAUL, or the OFFICE of preſbyter. An elder Paul was, but never a company of elders, preſbyters, as the word expreſsly ſignifies. The OFFICE of preſbyter has no hands to lay upon any one.

If Jeſus prohibit all lordly dominion among his miniſters: if his infallible oracle marks the office of biſhop and preſbyter, to be ONE and the SAME: if it lodges ordination of paſtors, which the dioceſan claims as his peculiar prerogative, in the hand of preſbyters; it follows, that the whole office of biſhop, above a teaching preſbyter, with all appendages thereof, deans, vicars, chancellors, cardinals, patriarchs, pope, &c. are an Antichriſtian invention, obtruded on the church of God.

In vain, ſhould I hear that men, holy, renowned, have been BISHOPS, or their underlings. Muſt I be a follower of ſuch rather than of Jeſus Chriſt and his word? Before the reformation, men, holy, renowned, Bernard, Anſelm, and others, ſupported the dignity, ſupported manifold abominations, of the Romiſh pope. Luther, holy, renowned, with all his might propagate conſubſtantiation, a notion never a whit leſs ſtupid, than its Romiſh ſiſter of an almoſt ſimilar name. David, a

(a) Tit i. 5. 6. (b) 1 Pet. v. 1. 2. 2 John i. (c) 2 Tim. i. 6. 1 Tim. i. 14.



man according to the heart of his Maker, indulged himself to have a multitude of wives. Must I improve the holiness of these, as a bait to decoy, as a reason to imitate their palpable errors? When the prejudice of education, the darkness of the time, the custom of the place, the temptations of honour, profit, or hazard, concur to blind the conscience; the crime is less aggravated; but none of these change the statutes of Heaven.

In vain, should I hear the Protestant churches mostly submit to, or allow of diocesan bishops. I know it to be false and inconclusive. Expressions of this amount may have dropt from foreign Protestant writers, through flattery or misinformation: but certain it is, no Protestant church, besides England and Ireland, have diocesan bishops properly so called. In Sweden, in Denmark, and Norway, some pastors possessed of more eminent places and benefices, are termed bishops, or superintendents, but have scarce a shadow of more power or authority than the rest of their brethren. In vain, were I told, the Scotch superintendents at the reformation, were almost the very SAME with diocesan bishops. Their power of superintendency was considered as merely temporary, relating to that broken state of the church. Their labour in preaching, and other ministerial work, was more abundant than others. Their power was granted by one assembly, and continued but for about half a year, till the sitting of the next; to which they were to account for their conduct; and receive censure, if they had done amiss. Is not this the very reverse of his diocesan lordship? Nothing, therefore, but deceit, noted and daring, will pretend to parallel diocesans to our antiquated superintendents.

In vain, should I hear, the grandeur of bishops dignifies the Christian church. If so, why did not Jesus, whose is the earth, and fulness thereof, secure outward pomp and greatness to his blessed apostles, and their fellow-labourers in him? If the kingdom of Christ consist *not in meat and drink, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*: if it is *not of this world*; it must be ministers pure adherence to his truth, their holy lives and painful endeavours to win souls to Christ; not their stately houses, their numerous retinue, their fine horses, coaches,

coaches, or robes, that adorn their profession and office. Who knows not, that by the unaccountably unequal distribution of the church's revenues in England and Ireland, so many of the clergy riot in pride and wealth; scarce remembering their connections with the souls of men: while multitudes, to the scandal of their religion and country, oppressed with almost beggaring poverty, are driven to adjoin some carnal trade; or, like parasites, sneak to the liberal great?

To no purpose, were I told, that diocesan bishops are a centre of unity; a means of preventing ecclesiastic divisions. The heavenly oracles represent Christ, his Spirit, and truth, as her genuine centre. *One Lord; one Spirit; one faith; one baptism; one hope* of our calling, constitute all the saints, all the churches, *ONE BODY* of Christ (a). Diocesans rather divide the church into large parcels; unless you admit his Holiness, or some other, for their universal lord. Nor are contentions less rife among these who have lordly bishops, than with these who detest them. With pleasure, I mark, that the English church, in her articles and homilies, plainly exhibits every leading truth of the glorious gospel. She allows not of purgatory; of prayer for the dead; of worshipping saints, angels, images. She maintains not the monster of transubstantiation. She encourages the common use of the sacred word. Her religious worship is performed in a known tongue. The grosser abominations of Popery are detested; at least, not openly approved by her members. No doubt, there are in her a goodly number of valuable saints. No doubt sundry of her bishops have been, or are of the number. Their hierarchic office, however, being destitute of warrant in the oracles of truth, I cannot apprehend to be a centre of union to any thing, but corruptions almost unnumbered; in contradiction to the word of God, borrowed from Antichrist, and by him, mostly, from Heathenish Rome.

How shocking, to observe most of her clergy indulged, in habitually preaching and writing, as occasion offers; in plain contradiction to the articles and homilies

(a) Eph. iv. 3---5.

they solemnly espoused or subscribed! Is this a whit better than Jesuitic equivocation? As if ignorance was believed the mother of devotion; how shocking to see the bulk of the common people, as ignorant of the Christian faith as at Rome! And not a few ordained to the ministry, who, Burnet informs us, for ignorance could scarce be admitted to the Lord's table, in any well constituted Christian church! As if the mere act of receiving the sacraments rendered them effectual to salvation; how shocking, that pastors should be in danger from the law, for refusing the sacred seals to such as, they know, are the most abandoned rakes, not excommunicate by the lay chancellor! How shocking to observe thousands of professed ambassadors of Christ, in practice scarce distinguishable from these pious gentlemen who command our troops! How shocking to observe one man allowed to hold a variety of congregations as pastor; to serve whose immortal souls, he hires a curate at the easiest rate! To see not only reading of sermons, but of prayer, prevail; and patronage, with all her native attendants, abound!

Has his Holiness two swords, his power ecclesiastic and civil? Are not English bishops, lords in the church, and peers in the state? In the worship of God, are numerous rites, not warranted by his word, imposed at Rome? In England, how similar the case! The English holy-days; ten moveable, twenty-six fixed, festivals; fifteen vigils; about ninety-five fast-days; in Lent, Fridays, Ember, and Rogation days; are they not the same with the Romish? Their collects, confessions, absolutions, lessons of psalms, prophets, gospels, epistles; nay, of the vilest part of the Apocrypha, instead of God's word; and their six canticles; are they not generally the very same with these at Rome? To the same occasions of feasts, fasts, vigils, offices of baptism, Lord's supper, marriage, burial, confirmation, visitation of sick, churching of women, &c. are they applied. The epistles, gospels, and psalms, used in their liturgy, are not according to our own translation; but according to the Romish. Their *fourfold*, or in cathedrals, *tenfold* or more, repetition of the Lord's prayer; their kneeling at confession and absolution; their repeating the Lord's prayer



prayer on their knees after the minister; their standing up at the *Gloria Patri*; their standing at the reading or singing of the falsely termed *Athanasian creed*; their standing and repeating the common ONE; their crying out after the parson, *Lord, have mercy on us; Christ have mercy on us*; their responding to him, as he repeats the litany; their reading the psalms alternately with him; their asking mercy and grace on their knees, after the reading of each commandment; their singing psalms and anthems with musical instruments; their baptism of children upon godfathers or godmothers ridiculously declaring as if the infant itself, that he renounces the devil, the world, and the flesh, believes the creed, and desires to be baptized; their baptizing with the sign of the cross made over the child's forehead; their confirmation of children about ten or twelve years of age, by the laying on of the bishop's hands, for conferring the Holy Ghost; their fixing the celebration of the Lord's supper, chiefly to the superstitious seasons of Christmas, Pasch, &c.; their idolatrous bowing at the altar in partaking of it; their private administration of the sacraments; their idolatrous bowing at the sound of the name Jesus, and towards the east; their consecration of churches; their observing feasts of dedications and wakes; their marriage by the symbolical ring; their consigning to eternal happiness, in their office for burial, all but unbaptized and excommunicate persons; their cruel supposal of the damnation of infants unbaptized; whence came they all, but from Rome? The division of their clergy into archbishops, bishops, deans, chapters, prebends, archdeacons, parsons, vicars, curates; their sacred habits for ministering in, albs, surplice, chasable, amiet, gown, meniple, zone; their presumptuous pretence, in ordination, to confer the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the bishop's hands; whence derived, but from Rome? Their rules for ordination of ministers and deacons, are they not almost to a hair the very same with these of the Romish PONTIFICAL?

In the reign of Elizabeth, was not the English liturgy made liker the Romish, than it had been in the days of her godly brother Edward? To please the Popish party, the prayer for deliverance from the tyranny and detestable

able enormities of the bishop of Rome, was kindly expunged: the office for the Lord's supper was altered, that it might not so much as seem to condemn transubstantiation, and the worshipping of the elements. The renowned Cambden, and others, inform us, that not a few Papists highly applauded the English service, and expressed their hopes it would in time reduce the nation to their holy father the Pope. Pius the IVth, and Gregory the XIIIth, liked it so well, that they offered it their papal ratification. Who that reads the Romish Breviary, Ritual, and Mass-book, sees not that it is collected therefrom?

You ask me, Amelius, "Why the church, by her own power, may not appoint holy-days, or significant rites in her worship? and what the worse are things that the Papists used them before us?" Knows not my friend, that the God of infinite wisdom understands better what rites are proper for his worship, than our learnedst mortals; that he hath laid aside many once institute by himself; that he hath peremptorily forbid us to add to, or take from his statutes; hath charged us to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free; intangled in the yoke of bondage to no human imposition in his worship, hath condemned all will-worship, and prohibit us to *touch, taste, or handle it*; hath assured us, that in *vain we worship him, if we teach for doctrines the commandments of men*; and that our observance of uncommanded holy-days, marks our abuse of the gospel (a)? that he hath peremptorily forbid us to worship himself in the manner of idolaters; hath assured us, that our observance of idolatrous rites leads us away from him; and kindles his fury against us; hath commanded to destroy every monument of idolatry and superstition (b)? With divine approbation, Hezekiah destroyed the brazen serpent, once an ordinance of God, because the Jews idolized it (c). Under pain of being held guilty of destroying our brother, we are charged to beware of offending him by *eating of flesh*, or like practice of

(a) Deut. xii. 32. Gal. v. 1. Col. ii. 18.--23. Matth. xv. 9. Gal. iv. 9.--11.

(b) Deut. vii. 23. and xii. 30. and xiv. 1.

(c) 2 Kings xviii. 6.

things in themselves indifferent (a). Is it not the prerogative of God alone, to bless a religious rite? Why then should any church affect to be wise above what is written? Why affront the wisdom of their Maker, their Saviour, by attempting to adorn his worship beyond what himself judged proper? What God commands, is certainly no worse, use it who will. But why, for the sake of popish traditions, make his *commandments of none effect*? Why desert his statutes, unerring, easy, and plain; to extract our rules of worship, from the canons of his idolatrous foes? In his worship, why use rites, we cannot, and he never promised, to bless? For indifferent things or worse, why harden the Romists, encouraging them to hope, their ceremonies practised will quickly promote our return to their church, *a synagogue of Satan*? For the sake of what is far less innocent than eating of flesh, why offend our Protestant brethren; force the Puritans from our church-fellowship; from part of their liberties, and sometimes their life?

L E T T E R V I I I.

**T**HAT neither in the Christian people, the civil magistrate, or in diocesan bishops, Christ has lodged the office-power of his church, has been illustrate. Hath he placed it in the officers of his own appointment? Yes. To these alone, his oracles mark, he hath *given the keys of the kingdom of heaven*. To these alone, he hath *given POWER for the edification* of his church. To these alone, he commands his church to *be subject*. To these alone, he assigns *double honour* (b).

These officers of the New-Testament church, are either extraordinary, requisite to lay her foundation; or ordinary, necessary for the continued government thereof. The former, now ceased, were *apostles, evangelists, prophets* (c). An immediate mission from Jesus Christ,

(a) Rom. xiv. 13.---23. 1 Cor. viii. 11.---13. and vi. 12.  
 (b) Matth. xvi. 19. and xviii. 18.---20. 2 Cor. x. 8. Heb. xii. 7. 1 Tim. v. 17. (c) 1 Cor. xii. 28. Eph. iv. 11.



54 *On the government of the Christian church.*

equally extending to all nations, as occasion offered ; infallibility in doctrine, and in founding and directing the churches ; power to confer the miraculous influence of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands ; a constant power to work miracles, as divinely directed, and to speak in languages they never learned ; a power to send forth evangelists, ordain presbyters and deacons, marked the apostles (*a*). To travel, preach, and baptize, &c. along with the apostles ; or sent by them, to plant and water the churches, and settle ordinary officers and courts therein, was the work of the evangelist (*b*). To be, on proper occasions, divinely inspired with the knowledge of future times, and enabled infallibly to explain obscure passages of the Old Testament, characterized their prophets (*c*). The ordinary, the fixed officers, are variously represented to us in the sacred lists. Now they are comprehended under the names of *bishops and deacons*. Anon we are informed, that these bishops, overseers, elders, presbyters, are of two sorts ; such as only *rule well* ; and such as also *labour in word and doctrine* : these last are at least seemingly distinguished into *pastors and teachers* (*d*) : whatever may be the difference betwixt the two, whether the *teacher* signifies somewhat like the ancient catechists, or like our probationers ; or perhaps such as train up others for the ministry ; it is certain, the whole substance of the office is resident in every gospel-minister. To examine what divine claim the *pastor*, the *ruling elder*, the *deacon*, has to his office, with the scripture-account of their qualifications and work, now requires our attention.

The pastoral office, is a spiritual relation to the Christian church ; whereby one is empowered to preach the word, dispense the sacraments to her members, and concur in ruling them. Its divine institution is marked with a sun-beam, in the sacred page. There I find, that God hath set some in the church, **TEACHERS** : that our ascended Redeemer hath given her **PASTORS** and **TEACHERS** : that the Holy Ghost had made some, **BI-**

(*a*) Mark xvi. 15.--20. Acts i. to xxviii. chap. (*b*) 1 Tim. i. 3. &c. 2 Tim. iv. Tit. i. (*c*) Acts xxi. 10. 11. 1 Cor. xiv. 29.--32. (*d*) Phil. i. 1. 1 Tim. iii. 1 Tim. v. 17. Eph. iv. 11.

SHOPS, OVERSEERS, to feed her; and furnishes some for *prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation* (a). Divinely are the qualifications requisite in candidates for the ministry prescribed; that they be *blameless; of good report; apt to teach*; such as *hold fast divine truth*, and are *able to convince gainsayers* (b). Divinely it is required, these qualifications be impartially tried, ere one is ordained to the ministry; that hands be not laid suddenly upon him (c). Divinely are such characters given to gospel-ministers, as import authority and call to their work; *pastors, teachers, right rulers, stewards of the mysteries of God, preachers* or heralds, *ambassadors for Christ, bishops, overseers* of God's flock, *angels of the churches, over the saints in the Lord, stars in Christ's right hand, ministers of Christ, faithful ministers in the Lord, labourers sent forth by the Lord of the harvest* (d). The manner of entrance on their office is divinely marked out, that they be invited by *the votes, the suffrages*, of the Christian people; and ordained in every church, by *fasting, prayer, and laying on of the hands of the presbytery* (e). The ministerial work is divinely prescribed: that they *take the oversight of the flock willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; not as lords over God's heritage, but as ensamples to the flock*: that they *neglect not the exercise of the gifts of office given them by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery; leave not the word of God to serve tables, even of the poor; give themselves wholly to reading, meditation, exhortation, doctrine; preach the word, be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine, in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves* (f); be habitually willing, and under an inward necessity to *preach the gospel, ready to spend and be spent for the service of the faith of the saints*; feed not themselves, but the flock; watch for

(a) 1 Cor. xii. 28. Eph. iv. 11. Acts xx. 28. Rom. xii. 6---8.

(b) 1 Tim. iii. 1---8. Tit. i. 5---9. (c) 1 Tim. v. 21. 22.

(d) Eph. iv. 11. 1 Cor. xii. 28. 1 Tim. v. 17. 1 Cor. iv. 1. Luke xii. 42. Rom. x. 14. 2 Cor. v. 19. 20. Acts xx. 28. 1 Pet. v. 2. Rev. i. 20. 1 Thess. v. 12. Rev. i. 20. Col. i. 7. Eph. vi. 21. Matth. ix. 38. (e) Acts i. 15---26. and xiv. 23. 1 Tim. iv. 14. Tit. i. 5. (f) 1 Pet. v. 2. 3. 1 Tim. i. 14. Acts vi. 2. 4. 1 Tim.

iv. 15. 2 Tim. iv. 2. and ii. 25.

the souls of men, as these that must give an account to Christ; exert themselves earnestly to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; and prepare them for the inheritance of the saints in light (a): that they dispense the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper; ordain others to the ministry; *commit the gospel to faithful men*; censure, reject, and deliver to Satan the unruly and obstinate; absolve from censure, offenders penitent (b). Divinely prescribed is the carriage of people toward ministers as such; that they *know* and acknowledge them as his servants; *esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*; give them *double honour*; remember them and their instruction; *follow* their scriptural doctrine and pattern; *obey* and *submit* to them as spiritual rulers; *communicate* to them in all temporal good things; *pray* for them with an holy conversation, and otherwise encourage them; *that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified*; and that they may give their account with joy and not with grief (c). Divinely secured is the pastor's proper encouragement; that their *sufficiency is of God*; Jesus walks among them; holds them as stars in his right hand; is *with them alway unto the end of the world*, to assist them in their work; will ratify the discipline they exercise in his name, binding whom they bind, and loosing whom they loose; will sympathize with them in what treatment they receive in the discharge of their office, rewarding every kindness, and resenting every injury done them (d). Are these things so? Who then can doubt the heavenly warrant of their function?

But is the office of the gospel-ministry perpetually necessary? Is it divinely institute to continue, till the end of time? The scripture attests it is. The foundations thereof, just mentioned, are of a moral and *permanent*

(a) 2 Cor. xii. 15. 1 Cor. ix. 16. 17. Ezek. xxxiv. 2. Heb. xiii. 17. Acts xxvi. 18. (b) Matth. xxviii. 19. 1 Cor. xi. 23.---29. 1 Tim. iv. 14. 2 Tim. ii. 2. 1 Cor. v. 4. 13. Tit. iii. 10. 2 Cor. ii. 6. 7. (c) 1 Thess. v. 12. 13. 1 Tim. v. 17. Heb. xiii. 7. 17. Gal. vi. 6. 1 Cor. ix. 7.---19. 1 Thess. iii. 1. (d) 2 Cor. iii. 3. 5. 6. Rev. ii. 1. Matth. xxviii. 20. and xvi. 19. John xx. 23. Matth. x. 40.---42. Luke x. 16. John xiii. 20.



nature, equally respecting every period of the Christian church. The ordinances connected therewith, remain till *the end of time*; the work of the ministry is for edifying the body of Christ, *till they all come, in the unity of the faith, to the fulness of the stature of perfect men in Christ (a)*. Instruction, and baptism of the nations, are to continue *even unto the end of the world*. In the Lord's supper, his death is shewed forth *till he come again* at the last day; and in dispensing these ordinances, he promiseth to be with his apostles, and their ministerial successors, *even until the consummation, or end of the world*. Amen (b). The need of a gospel-ministry is *perpetual*. Till the end of time, the nature of man continues corrupt; Satan continues to deceive; gospel-mysteries continue sublime, and much unknown; erroneous teaching rages, or is ready to break forth (c). The ends of a gospel-ministry, the converting and confirming of the elect, and the silencing of gainfayers, are *perpetual (d)*. The removal of the gospel-ministry from a particular place, is marked as a *heavy judgment*, which, no more than the abolition of the Hebrew ceremonies, it could be, if it was not institute to continue, till the end of the world (e). To mark its permanent appointment, wonderfully, as pages divine and human record, the Almighty preserves it, amid even the reign and rage of the Antichristian beast (f). No scripture insinuates, that ought is provided to supply its room: therefore itself must continue, God having provided for us, under the Christian period, not worse, but BETTER things, than under the old (g). The giving of the Spirit can no more exclude a gospel-ministry, afterward; than in the apostolic age, it did: can no more exclude the necessity and usefulness of this, than of the scripture itself.

(a) Eph. iv. 11---13. (b) Matth. xxviii. 19. 20. 1 Cor. xi. 26. (c) 1 Tim. iv. 1---3. 2 Tim. iii. 1---7. 2 Thess. iii. 2---13. (d) Acts xxvi. 18. Eph. iv. 11---15. Tit. i. 11. (e) Rev. ii. 5. (f) Rev. xi. and xii. (g) Heb. xi. 40.

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## L E T T E R IX.

**W**ithout some proper furniture, it is absurd, to imagine any should be sent of God, to the ministerial work. When the ascended Jesus gave to the church, apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers; he *gave gifts unto men*. *Who*, saith he, *goeth a warfare at any time on his own charges* (a)? What is the furniture, the qualifications prerequisite, according to the sacred word? A blameless conversation; a good report; experience of the self-debasing work of the Spirit of God; compassion to the souls of men; a fixedness in the Christian doctrines; a disposition faithfully to perform his vows; an *aptness to teach* the ignorant, and convince gainsayers (b). Knowledge of languages, knowledge of the history and sciences of this world, are useful handmaids to assist us in the study of divine things. To preach from the oracles of God, without capacity to peruse the originals, especially if versant in romances and plays, I abhor; I detest. This *aptness to teach*, however, consists not chiefly in any of these; but in a capacity to conceive spiritual things, and with some distinctness express their conceptions to the edification of others; in that energy and life, whereby one, as affected himself, declares the truths of God, in a simple, serious, bold, and conscience-touching manner (c). The difference of this from human eloquence, loud bawling, and theatrical action, is evident. These may touch the passions, affect not the conscience: they may procure esteem to the preacher, none to Christ: these are the product of nature or art; this the distinguished gift of God, without which in a certain degree, none can have evidence, he was divinely sent to minister the gospel of Christ.

No appearance of furniture, real or pretended, can warrant a man's exercising the ministry, unless he have a

(a) Eph. iv. 8. 11. 1 Cor. ix. 7. (b) 1 Tim. iii. 1.---8. 2 Tim. ii. 2. Tit. i. 5.---9. (c) 1 Tim. ii. 7. 1 Cor. xii. 8. Col. iv. 3. 4. 1 Cor. iv. 19. and ii. 4. 2 Cor. ii. 14. 2 Tim. ii. 15. 1f. i. 4. 1 Cor. xiv. 24. 25. Acts xxiv. 25.

regular call. That ALL *may prophesy one by one*, is indeed hinted in the sacred records: but there it is evident, inspiration treats of what pertains to extraordinary officers in the church; hence there is mentioned the *gift of tongues*, extraordinary *Psalms, revelations*: the ALL that might prophecy are therefore, not ALL the members of the church; not *women*, who are forbid to speak in the church; but ALL the extraordinary officers called prophets (a). The ALL, that were scattered abroad from Jerusalem, and *went about preaching the gospel* (b), could not be ALL the believers; for there remained at Jerusalem a church of believers for Saul to make havock of. It must therefore have been ALL the preachers besides the apostles. To strengthen this, let it be observed, that the word here rendered PREACHING, is no where in scripture, referred to one out of office: that every one of this dispersion, we afterward hear of, are represented as evangelists, pastors, or teachers (c). Parents and masters convey the same instructions that ministers do; but with a different authority: not as *ministers of Christ*, or officers in his church. If either gifts or saintship entitled to preach the gospel; wo would be unto every gifted person, every saint, that did not preach it (d). If our adored Redeemer refused the work of a civil JUDGE; because not humanly vested with such power (e); will he allow his followers to exercise an office far more important, without any regular call? His oracles distinguish between the mission of persons; and their gifts, sometimes called a receiving of the Holy Ghost, John xx. 21. 23. If. vi. 6. 7. 9.

To render the point incontestibly evident, he demands, how men shall preach *except they be sent*? declares, that *no man rightly taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. I sent them not, therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord* (f). The characters divinely affixed to ministers, preachers or heralds, *ambassadors, stewards, watchmen, angels, messengers*, brightly mark their call and commission to their work. The inspired rules for the qualifica-

(a) 1 Cor. xiv. 31. (b) Acts viii. 2. 4. (c) Acts viii. 3. and ix. 1. and xi. 19. and xiii. 1. (d) 1 Cor. ix. 16-17. (e) Luke xii. 13. 14. (f) Rom. x. 15. Heb. v. 6. Jer. xxiii. 21. 32.

tions, the election, the ordination, of ministers, are divinely charged to be kept *till the day*, the second coming of *Jesus Christ* (a). For intermeddling with the sacred business, without a regular call, has the Almighty severely punished numbers of men. Witness the destruction of Korah and his company; the rejection of Saul; the death of Uzza; the leprosy of Uriah; the disaster of the sons of Scheva (b), &c.

To rush into it, if gifted, or imagine we are so, at our own hand, introduces the wildest disorder; and the most shocking errors: it did so at Antioch, and the places adjacent; where some falsely pretended a mission from the apostles (c). This too was its effect with the German Anabaptists; and with the sectaries of England. Aversion at manual work, pride of abilities, a disturbed imagination, a carnal project to promote, prompts the man to be preacher. Such ultroneous rushing is inconsistent with the deep impression of the charge; and the care to manifest their mission, every where in scripture, obvious in the ministers of Christ (d). However sound his doctrine; great his abilities; warm his address; where is the divine promise of God's especial presence, protection, or success, to the ultroneous preacher? Where is his conduct commanded, commended, or unmarked with wrath, exemplified, in the sacred word? How then can the preaching, or our hearing, of such, be in faith? How can it be acceptable to God, or profitable to ourselves? For *whatsoever is not of faith, is sin* (e). Falsely this preacher pretends a mission from Christ: wickedly he usurps an authority over his church (f): rebelliously he deserts his own calling, and attempts to void the office, his Saviour has appointed; to frustrate the dispensation of the gospel committed to his faithful ambassadors. For, how can they fulfil their ministry, if others take the work out of their hand? How can they *commit it to faithful men*, if, not waiting their commission, men rush into it at pleasure?

(a) 1 Tim. iii. 1.---8. and v. 21. 22. (b) Numb. xvi. 1 Sam. xiii. 1 Chron. xiii. 2 Chron. xxvi. (c) Acts xv. Gal. ii. 5.  
(d) 2 Cor. iii. 5. 6. Jer. i. Ezek. iii. Rom. i. 1. Gal. i. 15. 16.  
John iii. 27. 28. (e) Rom. xiv. 23. (f) 1 Thess. v. 12.  
John vii. 28.



Let. 9. *Of the qualifications, &c. of gospel-ministers.* 61

In vain, pleads the ultroneous preacher, that a particular mission to the office of preaching and dispensing the sacraments was only necessary, when the gospel was first published to the Heathen. From age to age, it is *as new*, to children, *as new*, to such as never heard it. Nor, when hinting the necessity of a mission, does the inspiring Spirit make any distinction, whether the gospel be newly dispensed, or not: *What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.* In vain, he pleads an immediate commission from God: in his infallible statutes, having fixed standing rules of vocation to the ministry, by the mediation of men; God gives us no command, no encouragement, to hope for an immediate call, till the end of time. Absurdly then, we allow any to have such a call, till we see *the signs of an apostle wrought in him.* It is not sufficient, he be found in his doctrine; exemplarily holy in his life; active in his labour; disinterested in his aims, seeking not his own, but the honour of Christ; not his own carnal profit, but the spiritual welfare of men: every ordinary preacher is, or ought to be so. But, to this claimant of a mission uncommon; working of miracles, or such extraordinary credentials, must demonstrate, he hath not run unsent.

In vain, the ultroneous preacher boasts of his feelings, his success; his moving his audience; his reforming their lives; as if these demonstrate his call from God. On earth, was ever delusion carried on without pretence to; or without appearances of these? Let them, who know the history of Popery; of Mahometism; Quakerism, &c.; say if they were. Who knows not, that the Pharisaic set pretended far more strictness, far more devotion, than the family of Christ? Who knows not, that Satan may, and has oft *transformed himself into an angel of light*; his ministers into the form of the inspired apostles; and his influences, almost indiscernibly similar to these of the Spirit of Jesus Christ? Who knows not, how oft vain glory, proud and false extolling of himself and party, in their number, their spiritual experience, and high advances in holiness, mark the distinguished impostor? how oft his sermons are larded with these?

No more, Amelius, tell me, if the sermon be good, you do not regard who preach it. If God has prescribed

bed a method of call; has stated the qualifications of the candidate; has warned against preachers unsent; has oft marked their guilt with visible strokes of his wrath; be ashamed to talk, at so arrogant, so careless a rate. Lay it not, in the power of the Mesopotamian wizard? lies it not in the power of a Romish Jesuite; nay, if permitted, of Beelzebub; for a time to preach you many truths of the gospel, in the warmest strains; the loftiest language? Would you, my friend, acknowledge the THREE, for honoured ambassadors of Jesus Christ? Tell me not, your preacher is wonderfully pious and good: perhaps you have only his own attestation; where better known, he may be a drunkard, a swearer, a villain, for you. Suppose he were pious: so was Uzziah; yet it pertained not to him to *execute the priests office*. Say not, he is wonderfully gifted; speaks like *never man*: perhaps, so was Korah, a man famous, and of renown: such, perhaps, were the vagabond sons of Scheva. Say not, his earnestness in his work marks his heavenly call: no, such were the Satanic exorcists just mentioned: such was Mahomet the vilest impostor. To abolish the idolatry, and various other abominations of his country, he exposed himself to cruel reproach; to manifold hardship, and hazard of life: about fourteen years almost, unsuccessful, he persevered in this difficult, but delusive attempt. What hunger! what cold! what torment and death! have some Jesuitic, and other antichristian missionaries undergone, to propagate the most ruining delusions of hell! all under pretence of earnestness to gain sinners to Christ and his church! In the view of eternity, ponder, my friend, the scripture no where saith, How shall they preach *except they be gracious? except they be gifted? except they be in earnest?* but, *How shall they preach except they be SENT?*

## L E T T E R X.

**I**N these divinely qualified for the ministry, there are *diversities of gifts*, though but *one spirit* (a). As the

(a) 1 Cor. xii. 4.

same

same food, though abundantly wholesome and nourishing, is not equally suited to the taste, appetite, and constitution, of different persons and nations; so the same gifts in a candidate, for the gospel-ministry, are not equally adapted to every person and place. To secure edification, there must therefore be, a choice of the GIFTS most apposite. Who fitter to make it, than these who are to enjoy the use thereof, if their senses be exercised to discern good and evil? Can any man pretend to know better, what gifts suit the case of my soul, than I do myself?

These, ignorant of the fundamental truths of Christianity: these, scandalous, profane, deniers of the divine original of the Old and New Testament, or of any truth therein plainly revealed: these, neglecters of the public, private, and secret worship of God: these, given to cursing, swearing, Sabbath profanation, drunkenness, whoredom, or other scandalous courses, are destitute of capacity and right to chuse a gospel-minister. The ignorant are utterly incapable to judge, of either the preacher's matter or method. The openly wicked have their hatred of Christ and a faithful minister marked in their forehead: neither, as has been formerly hinted (a), appear visible members of the Christian church. To admit them therefore, to chuse a Christian pastor, would be a method, introducing ruin and wo; a method equally absurd, as for unfree men to chuse the magistrates of a burgh: rather, equally absurd, as if ignorant babes, and our enemies the French, should be sustained electors of our members of parliament, and privy council (b).

Whether visible believers, adult, blameless, have a right to chuse their pastors and other officers, must now be examined. All along from the Reformation, it has been the avowed principle of Scotch Presbyterians, they have. Their *first book of discipline*, published A. D. 1560, declares the lawful calling to the ministry to consist in the election of the people, the examination of the ministry, and admission by both; and that no pastor should be intruded upon any particular kirk without their

(a) Letter 4th.

(b) Eph. ii. 12. 19.



consent (a). Their *second book of discipline* declares, that the (people's) liberty of chusing church-officers continued till the church was corrupted by Antichrist: that patronage flowed from the Pope's canon law; and is inconsistent with the order prescribed in God's word (b). From various documents, the Assembly 1736, declared it obvious, that, from the Reformation, it had been the fixed principle of this church; *That no minister ought to be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation*: they seriously recommended a due regard hereto, in planting of vacancies; as judicatories would study the honour of God, and the edification of men (c). It is the *law of Heaven*, however; the *book of the Lord*; that here, and every where, I intend to build my faith upon.

That of Matthias is the first instance of an election of an officer in the Christian church. No doubt then it is marked in the sacred history, as a pattern for the ages to come. Being an officer extraordinary, his call was in part immediately divine, by the determination of the lot. Being a church-officer, he was chosen by the church, as far as consisted with his extraordinary office. The disciples about Jerusalem, an *hundred and twenty*, were gathered together. Peter represented the necessity of filling up Judas' place in the apostolate, with one who could be a meet witness of Jesus' doctrines, miracles, death, resurrection: the *hundred and twenty disciples* chose, *appointed*, or presented two; whom they judged proper for that work. The office being extraordinary, and perhaps, the votes equal, the decision, which of these two, was referred to the divine determination of the LOT. After prayer for a perfect ONE, it fell upon Matthias; and he was Synkatepsephisthe, *by suffrages* or votes, *added to the number* of the apostles (d).

Had the next election of a church-officer entirely excluded the Christian people, one had been tempted to suspect, Matthias' extraordinary case was never designed for a pattern. Instead hereof, the choice, being of an ordinary officer, is entirely deposite in their hands. Never were men better qualified for such an election, than

(a) Chap. iv. (b) Chap. xii. (c) Acts xiv. (d) Acts i. 15.---26.  
the

the inspired, the Spirit-discerning apostles; yet when restrained, by laborious attendance to their principal work, the ministry of the word, and of prayer, from sufficient leisure to distribute their multiplied alms, to their now numerous poor; and directed by the Holy Ghost; they ordered the Christian people to *look out*, chuse, seven of their number, *men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom*; who might be ordained to the office of deacons. Judging of the mentioned qualifications, the Christian multitude, entirely of their own accord, chuse Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. These they presented to the apostles; who immediately ordained them, by prayer and imposition of hands (a). Here, by inspired appointment, the people had the whole power of electing their deacons. If they have the power of electing one ordinary officer; why not of all? If in the case of deacons, they can judge of the qualifications of *honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom*, what hinders them to judge of these, or the like, in the case of ministers? If Jesus and his apostles argued from the less to the greater (b); who can forbid us to argue, If it be right and equal for the Christian people to chuse deacons, who take care of their sacred alms; is it not much more right and equal, they have the choice of their pastors, who take the oversight of their souls?

A third instance of the Christian people electing their ecclesiastic officers, relates to the joint travels of Paul and Barnabas, at Lystra, and places around (c). These two divinely directed messengers of Christ, having *ordained, Gr. through suffrages or votes constitute, them elders, presbyters, in every city, and prayed with fastings, commended them to the Lord*. Here it is plainly marked, that these *elders, presbyters*, WERE CHOSEN BY SUFFRAGES, VOTES, in order to ordination. This the Greek word CHEIROTONESANTES, in our version, by the fraud of the English bishops, rendered HAD ORDAINED, plainly imports. CHEIROTONEO, the root, is borrowed from the custom of giving votes at Athens and elsewhere

(a) Acts vi. 1.--6.

(b) Matth. vi. 30.

1 Cor. ix. 10.

(c) Acts xiv. 23.

of Greece, by lifting up of the hand. Where ever it is used in the Greek Testament (a), and for ought I know in every Greek author, not posterior to Luke, the writer of the Acts; it constantly implies *to give vote or suffrage*. In the text before us, it agrees with Paul and Barnabas; because they presided in the choice, and finished the design of it by ordination. Here, moreover, it is evident, the persons chosen for *presbyters, elders*, were set apart to their office, not by a hurried prayer and riotous banquet; but by *prayer and fastings*; and this manner of choice and ordination was used in *every church*. The very performance of the work of ordination in public conjunction with the church, tacitly infers their consent (b).

Christ's commanding his people to *try the spirits*, to try false prophets, and flee from them (c), necessarily imports a right to chuse the worthy, and reject the vile; to chuse what suits our edification, and reject what doth not: for if we must receive whoever is imposed; there is no occasion for trial: we can have no other. The privilege of trial, here allowed his people by Christ, plainly supposes their having some ability for it: and by a diligent perusal of his word, and consulting his ministers, they may quickly become more capable. Has our adored Redeemer thus intrusted to his adult members, the election of their pastors; at what peril and guilt do any ministers or laicks concur to bereave them thereof, thrusting men into the evangelic office by another way; thus constituting them spiritual *thieves and robbers*? Instead of being *gentle* to church-members, as a *nurse cherisheth her children*; instead of *condescending to men of low degree, and doing all things to the glory of God, and the edification of souls*; is not this, to set at nought their brethren; exercise lordly dominion over the members of Christ; and rule them with rigour?

In the oracles of God, where is the hint, that the choice of pastors for Christian people, is lodged in any

(a) 2 Cor. viii. 19. (b) Tit. i. 5. (c) 1 John iv. 1. 2.  
2 John 10. 11. 1 Thess. v. 19. 20. Gal. i. 9. and v. 15. Matth.  
vii. 17. John v. 35.



but themselves? If, instead of Christians, of visible believers, there is a congregation of practical Heathens, ignorant, scandalous, or complaisant in conscience to such; no doubt, the presbytery ought, as for Heathens, to chuse them a pastor. But when it is otherwise; since men apostolic, inspired, put the choice from themselves, to the Christian people; who can believe it belongs to the clergy (a)? When Christ avers his *kingdom is not of this world*; when he threatens judgment without mercy to such, as, in his worshipping assemblies, more readily give a seat to the rich, with his gold ring, and gay clothing (b), than to the poor; can it be imagined, he has intrusted the choice of his ambassadors to men, for their greatness?

No more, my friend, repeat your contemptuous sneer, "Shall a cottager, poor, unlearned, who pays not one farthing of the stipend; and at next term will perhaps remove from the congregation, have an equal choice of a minister with his master, a gentleman; a nobleman, of liberal education, of distinguished abilities, who is head of a large family, has a fixed property and residence in the parish, and furnishes almost the whole benefice? Will you fly in the face of our civil law? Will you plead for the method of chusing church-officers, which already has produced so much strife, bloody squabbling, or murder?" If Christ's *kingdom*, as himself dying attested, *is not of this world*, how can outward learning, riches, honour, property, settled abode, or any thing worldly, constitute one a member thereof? Do the learning, wealth, &c. of a French resident in Britain, constitute him a freeman, a chuser of rulers, a ruler of the nation? Do these worldly things render one a better Christian? No. *Not many wise men after the flesh; not many mighty; not many noble, are called with an holy calling.* How ordinarily do rich men oppress the saints; draw them before judgment-seats; and blaspheme Jesus' worthy name, by which they are called (c)? If worldly privileges and endowments cannot make one a subject of the Mediator's spiritual king-

(a) Acts i. and vi.

(b) John xviii. 36.

Jam. ii. 1.—13.

(c) 1 Cor. i. 26. Jam. ii. 6.

dom; how can they entitle any to, or raise him above his brethren, in the *privileges* thereof? If by the Son of God, the poor cottager has been made *free indeed*; has been taught *to profit*; is *rich in faith*; is a *king and priest unto God*; hath *received a kingdom, which cannot be moved*; in the view of the Omniscient, and his angels, and every man wise to salvation, how little is he inferior to his rich, perhaps, his graceless master! Your rich man has college-education, understands philosophy, history, law, agriculture; will that infer, he understands his Bible, understands Christian principles, spiritual experiences, and what ministerial gifts best correspond therewith, better than his cottager; who *daily searches the scripture*, and has *heard and learned of the Father*? How oft are the great things of God *hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes*! Christ crucified was to the learned Greeks foolishness; but to the poorest believer, *the power of God, and the wisdom of God*. The *natural man*, however learned, *receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them; for they are spiritually discerned* (a). How easy to find the herdman, the silly woman, who will endure a trial on Christian principles to far other purpose, than many of your rich, your great! Your great man is the head of a numerous family, and has much influence in the corner. That, no doubt, is a strong motive for him, if he is a Christian, to be exceeding wary in his choice: if he is so, no doubt, his Christian judgment ought, as far as consists with spiritual liberty, to have its own weight. But while Christ's *kingdom is not of this world*; while in him, there is *neither male nor female, bond nor free*; headship over a family can found no claim to a spiritual privilege. Thousands are heads of families, but plainly *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel*, without God, and without hope in the world (b). Many are heads of families, who, by neglect of the daily worship of God, of religious instruction, and other unchristian conduct, ruin the same.

Boast not, Sir, of your great man's settled abode: boast not of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a

(a) Matth. xii. 25. 1 Cor. i. 23. 24. and ii. 14.  
xviii. 36. Gal. iii. 28. Eph. ii. 12.

(b) John

day may bring forth; how suddenly disasters, death, may pluck him out by the roots. The rich fathers, where are they? Do the nobles live for ever? Shall their dwelling continue to all generations? How oft the rich inheritance, in a few years, changes its master; while the race of the poor hovers about the same spot, for many generations! What if the cottager attend more to gospel-ministrations, in one year, than the rich proprietor in forty! What if, removing at next term, he carry his beloved pastor in his heart, and by effectual fervent prayers, availing much; by multiplied groanings that cannot be uttered; he bring manifold blessings on the parish and ministry he leaves; while your rich man, if wicked, if of the too common stamp, continues in it, for no better purpose than to distress the faithful pastor, corrupt the people, bring down a curse, and cumber the ground! Your great man bears the load of the stipend, no more than the poorest cottager. He purchased his property with this burden upon it: and on that account had its price proportionably abated. Suppose it were otherwise; might not a poor widow's *two mites* be more in Jesus' account, than all he gives? Will you, with the Samaritan forcerer, indulge the thought, that the *gifts of God*, the spiritual privileges of his church, *are to be purchased with money*? For money to erect the church, or defray the benefice, will you, with the infamous traitor, betray the Son of God in his church, his ordinance, his ministry, into the hand of sinners to be crucified?

Mention not, Sir, the civil law: the very worst statute thereof, relative to the point in hand, indirectly supposes the consent of the congregation. It leaves to the presbytery, the full power to judge, whether the presentee is fit for that charge? If the congregation generally oppose; with what candour do the presbytery, in Jesus' name, determine he is fit? The last statute relative hereto, declared the presentation void, unless it was accepted. Nor is there in being, any, but the *law of sin and death* within them, the law of itch after worldly gain, that obliges candidates to accept. How unmanly; how disingenuous then, my dear Amelius, is it for you, and your fellows, to blame the civil law, with the present



course of intrusions! Since the resurrection of Christ, I almost defy you to produce the instance of bloody squabbling, or like outrageous contention, in the choice of a pastor, where none but the visible members of Christ's mystical body, adult, and blameless, were admitted to act in the choice. But if, at any called popular elections, the power was sinfully betrayed into the hand of such baptized persons, as in ignorance and loose practice paralleled, if not transcended *Heathen men and publicans*; into the hand of these, who, to please a superior, to obtain a paltry bribe, or a flagon of wine, were readily determined in their vote for a minister; let the prostitutes of Jesus' ordinance answer for the unhappy consequences of their conduct. If they so enormously broke through the hedge of the divine law, no wonder a serpent bit them. But, Sir, have you forgot what angry, what tedious contests about civil claims, even before spiritual courts; and what necessity of a military guard at ordinations, the lodgment of the power of election in patrons or heritors, *as such*, has but lately occasioned?

To deprive the Christian people of their privilege in choosing their pastor; and give it to others, upon secular accounts, how pregnant with absurdity! It overturns the nature of Christ's spiritual kingdom, founding a claim to her privileges on worldly character and property. It gives these blessed lips the lie, which said, *My kingdom is not of this world*. It counteracts the nature of the church, as a voluntary society; thrusting men into a momentuous relation to her, without, nay, contrary to her consent. It settles the ministerial office upon a very rotten foundation: for how hard to believe the man is a minister of a Christian congregation, who never consented to his being such! to believe he has a pastoral mission from Christ, for whom providence would never open a door of entrance to the office; but he was obliged to be thrust in by the window, as a *thief and a robber*! If he comes unsent, how can I expect edification by his ministry; when God has declared, *Such shall not profit this people at all*? It implies the most unnatural cruelty. If the law of nature allow me the choice of my physician, my servant, my guide, my master, how absurd, to deny me the choice of a physician, a servant, a guide, to my soul;

soul; and to give it to another, merely because he has some more money, has a certain *piece of ground*, which I have not! How do these qualify him, or entitle him, to provide, what the eternal salvation of my soul is so nearly connected with, better than myself; if taught of God?

By patronage, how oft the honour of Christ and the souls of men, are betrayed into the hands of their declared foes! If the patron is unholy, profane; how readily the candidate he prefers, is too like himself! If a candidate be faithful, be holy; how readily, like Ahab in the case of Micaiah, he hates, he sends not for him! The complaisant chaplain, who almost never disturbed the family with the worship of God; who, along with the children or others, took off his cheerful glass; sung his wanton song; attended the licentious ball, or play-house; connived at, or swore a profane oath; took an hand at the cards; or ridiculed the mysteries, the experiences, the circumspect professor of the Christian faith; is almost certain to have the presentation: perhaps he covenanted for it, as part of his wages. For what Simony, sacrilege, and deceitful perjury, with respect to ordination-vows, patronage opens a door, he that runs may read. Shocked with the view, let me forbear!

## LETTER XI.

**S**UPPOSE a Christian shipwrecked upon a remote island, by private instruction, to convert sundry of the native Heathens to his Lord: perhaps, their election or consent might warrant him to preach, and dispense to them the sacraments. But in ordinary cases, no choice of the people, attended with as much prayer as you please, can supply the want of ordination. There is no instance of any such thing in the sacred record. Should the election of a candidate comprehend the substance of conferring the office, he could only be a minister to his own congregation, who chuse him; but merely a private person to such as did not. Should his people desert him; or by withdrawment of his subsistence, force him to leave them;

them; his office should be nullified; their choice being recalled, and made void. But what more absurd, than for other mens sins to strip the most faithful minister of his spiritual function! Election marks out the person; confers not the office: it consigns a candidate's exercise of it, to a particular part of the Christian flock. Ordination confers the office; constitutes the candidate a minister, not merely of the congregation he is principally appointed to, but of the whole catholic church. Hence, by baptism, he solemnly admits persons members, not merely of his congregation, but of the catholic church. By excommunication, he solemnly ejects, not merely from his own congregation, but from the catholic church. In consequence of his ministerial relation to the whole church, he exercises his office, or any part of it, any where, on a proper call. Nor is he re ordained, when he removes from one place to another. He hath not, however, an apostolic relation to the church; is not a *catholic minister* thereof. An apostle had an actual charge of the whole Christian church; had full power to exercise his ministry, where-ever he came, without regard to any human call. The relation of an ordinary pastor, to the *catholic* church, merely warrants him, to exercise his office any where in it, providing he receive a regular call.

That ordination of pastors is an ordinance of Jesus Christ, the sacred volumes abundantly mark. Through election by suffrages, Paul and Barnabas ordained **ELDERS, PRESBYTERS**, in **EVERY CHURCH** (a). By Paul's inspired orders, Titus was left at Crete, to ordain *elders, presbyters*, in **EVERY CITY** (b). By the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, was Timothy himself ordained: he was apostolically authorised and directed to ordain others; and informed, that these directions are to be observed, *till the day of Jesus Christ* (c).

That not election, but ordination, confers the sacred office, is no less evident. It made men, **DEACONS** and **PRESBYTERS**, which were not so before (d). Eleven of the apostles received their office without any choice of the people. The gift of the sacred function was given to Timothy, not by

(a) Acts xiv. 23. (b) Tit. i. 5. (c) 1 Tim. iv. 14. 15.  
22. and vi. 14. 2 Tim. ii. 2. (d) Acts vi. 3. Tit. i. 5.



the choice of the people, but *by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*. Such as, in ordination, *lay hands suddenly*, upon a candidate, are marked *partakers* with him, *in his sin*, if he run unsent (a). The solemn nature of ordination infers the same truth. To prevent laying hands upon him suddenly, there is imported in it, a solemn, an accurate trial, of the candidate's qualification for his work: if ought appear dubious, the ordination must be delayed till providence clear the affair. Till there be sufficient satisfaction, the presbytery cannot account to their Master, for *laying hands on him*; for conferring the office (b). If he is destitute of the distinguishing ministerial gift, or any other essential qualification, ten thousand elections, ten thousand ordinations, can no more render him *a minister of Christ*, than as many baptisms can render the Romish bells, living members of the Christian church. If Jesus withhold gifts, essentially necessary for the edifying of his body; it is plain he sends him not: how then can mortals give him a real ministerial commission? for *HE shutteth up a man, and there is no opening*. At your and his eternal hazard, do you people chuse; or you pastors ordain, such a candidate: *you can do nothing against, but FOR the truth*. Your power is given you, *for edification; not for destruction* (c). Solemnly tried and found qualified, he is to be set apart to the ministry, by *prayer, fasting, and laying on of the hands* of the presbytery (d).

No where, in the heavenly volume, do we find either precept or example, that Christian people have a whit more right to ordain their pastor, than midwives to baptize the children, they assist to bring forth. Ordination appears performed by apostles; by evangelists; and by a presbytery (e): but never by private Christians. Could these ordain their pastors, or other ecclesiastic officers; to what purpose did Paul leave Titus at Crete, *to ordain elders in every city*? To what purpose did him-

(a) 1 Tim. iv. 14. and v. 22. (b) 1 Tim. v. 21. 22.  
 (c) 2 Cor. xiii. 8. 10. (d) Acts xiii. 3. and xiv. 23. 1 Tim.  
 iv. 14. and v. 22. (e) Acts vi. 6. and xiv. 23. Tit. i. 5.  
 1 Tim. v. 22. and iv. 14.

self and Barnabas travel about, *ordaining elders in every church* (a)? Or with what sense did he write all the *rules about ordination* to the evangelists, Timothy and Titus; and never a word of them to the people, in any of his epistles?

Thus regularly ordained, the Christian pastor must enter on his important work. Endowed with spiritual wisdom and understanding; possessed of inward experience of the power of divine truth; enflamed with zeal for the glory of God, love to his work, and compassion to the perishing souls of men; he is to endeavour acquainting himself with the spiritual state of his flock; feed them with, not Heathenish and Arminian harangues, but the gospel of Christ, the sincere milk of the word; diligently preaching and rightly dividing it, according to their diversified state and condition (b). Assiduously growing in the knowledge and love of divine things, he is to instruct and confirm his hearers therein. Every divine truth, he is to publish and apply, as opportunity calls for: chiefly such as are most important, or, though once openly confessed, are in his time attacked and denied (c). Painfully is he to catechise his people; and, in Jesus' name, visit and teach them, from house to house (d). To awaken their conscience; promote the conversion of sinners; to direct and comfort the cast down, perplexed, tempted, deserted; to ponder the scripture, his own and others experience to qualify him for this work; must be his earnest care (e). Faithfully is he to administer the sacraments, to such *only*, as are duly qualified; and in the simple manner prescribed by Christ (f). Tenderly is he to care for the poor; sympathise with the afflicted; impartially visit the sick; deal plainly with their conscience; exhort and pray over them, in the name of the Lord (g). With impartiality, zeal, meekness, and prudence, he is to rule and govern

(a) Tit. i. 5. Acts xiv. 21.--23. (b) 1 Pet. v. 3. 2 Cor. v. 11. 1 Cor. ix. 16. Phil. i. 24-25. (c) 1 Tim. vi. 20. and iii. 15. Phil. i. 17. 2 Tim. iv. 8. (d) Gal. vi. 6. Heb. v. 11.--13. 1 Cor. iii. 1. Acts xx. 20. (e) Acts xxvi. 18. 19. 16. xl. 11. and l. 4. Ezek. xxxiv. 4. 2 Cor. ii. 4--7. (f) Matth. xxviii. 19, 20. and vii. 6. 1 Cor. xi. 23.--29. (g) Gal. ii. 9-10. 1 Tim. vi. 17. 18. 2 Cor. xi. 29. Jam. v. 17.

the church; admonish the unruly; rebuke the offenders; excommunicate the incorrigible; and absolve the penitent (a). Habitually is he to give himself, to effectual fervent prayer, for his flock, and for the church of God; travailling as in birth, till Jesus be formed in the souls of men (b). Be a man's parts, diligence, and apparent piety, as they will; negligence in this will blast his ministrations; and too clearly mark, he is therein chiefly influenced by some carnal motive, of honour or gain. Finally, he is constantly to walk before his flock, a distinguished pattern of sobriety, righteousness, holiness, humility, heavenliness, temperance, charity, brotherly kindness, and every good word and work. Without this his ministrations appear but a solemn farce of deceit (c).

Can then ministers accepting of a civil office, consist with their faithfulness to Christ, or the souls of men? No: it is the reverse of his blessed example, who refused to *judge* in a civil cause. It is contrary to his divine prohibition, to *exercise any lordly dominion*. It flies in the face of his twelve apostles, who averred, It was *not fit*, ministers of Christ *should leave the word of God, and serve tables*. It contradicts the famed apostle of the Gentiles, who avers, the most eminent man was insufficient for the ministry alone (d). It rebels against the inspired charge to ministers, to beware of *entangling themselves with the affairs of this life*; and to give themselves *wholly to reading, meditation, exhortation, and doctrine*; to *preach the word; instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine* (e).

Can ministers reading of sermons consist with the dignity of their office? Did Jesus, or his apostles, ever shew them an example? No. At Nazareth, when he read his text in the book of Esaias, he *closed his book*, and discoursed to the people. On the mount, *he opened his mouth, and taught*: I hear not that he took out his papers and

(a) Heb. xiii. 17. 1 Tim. v. 20. 21. Tit. iii. 10. 2 Cor. ii. 6. 7. (b) Acts vi. 2. 4. Eph. iii. 14. 19. Gal. iv. 19. (c) 1 Thess. ii. 10. (d) Luke xii. 14. Matth. xx. 25. Acts vi. 2. 2 Cor. ii. 16. (e) 2 Tim. ii. 4. 1 Tim. iv. 15. 2 Tim. iv. 2.



read. In his pentecostal sermon, Peter *lift up his voice, and said*: his papers and reading, I hear nothing of. After reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue, of Antioch in Pisidia, desired Paul and Barnabas, not to READ; but to SAY *on*. Our adored Saviour knew well enough how to direct his ambassadors: yet he ordered them, *Go PREACH*, not *read*, the gospel to every creature (a). How hard to believe, he who gives gifts to men, for the edifying of his body, would send the sermonist, whose memory and judgment are so insufficient, that, from neither, he can produce an half-hour's discourse, without reading it! How dull and insipid the manner! How absurdly it hinders the Spirit's assistance, as to matter, during the discourse! How shameful! Shall the bookless lawyer warmly and sensibly plead almost insignificant trifles? and shall the ambassador of Christ, deprived of his papers, be incapable to plead so short a space, in favour of his Master, and the souls of men?

## L E T T E R   X I I .

**N**OR is the office of the ruling *elder, presbyter*, less truly authorised in the inspired mandates of our blessed Redeemer. Its threefold cord of divine warrant, is not easily broken. Writing to the Romans, our inspired apostle affords us this remarkable document: *We being many, are one body in Christ, and members one of another. Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity: he that ruleth, with diligence, &c.* (b). Here we have a list of the ordinary officers of Christ; *one body*, the church. Here is the teacher; *he that teacheth*. Here is the pastor; *he that*

(a) Luke iv. 20. 21.    Matth. v. 2.    Acts ii. 14. and xiii. 15.  
 (b) Rom. xii. 5.---8.

*exhorteth.*

*exhorteth.* Here is the deacon; *he that giveth.* Here is another officer distinct from them all; *he that ruleth.* His description attests, that **RULING** is, if not his sole, his principal work. He cannot then be the gospel-minister, who, though he rules, yet not ruling, but preaching of the gospel, is his principal work. Though this ruler, *he that ruleth*, is placed after the deacon, it infers no inferiority. In the sacred lists, Christ reckons up his church-officers, in what order he pleaseth. In one, prophets are placed next to apostles: in another, evangelists are placed between them (a). The divine persons themselves are not alway reckoned in the very same order (b). *He that RULETH*, is here marked by a distinct character; as having a different *gift*, and a distinct work, from his fellow-officers. His office, therefore, must be **DISTINCT**. His furniture is of God; *is gifts,—grace given:* by God, his character of ruler, is imposed; and his manner of executing his office, prescribed: his function is therefore divinely warranted.

Elsewhere, the divine Spirit informs us, that *God hath set some in the church*, **GOVERNMENTS** (c). These must be understood of **GOVERNORS**; as *miracles* are afterward explained, of *workers of miracles*. These governments or governors, are marked to be **SET** in the **CHURCH**, not the state; by **GOD**, not men: they are marked to be *distinct* officers by themselves. Their character, **GOVERNMENT**, implies, that **RULING** is their principal work; rather, the whole execution of their office.

But no where shines the divine warrant of ruling elders, with more illustrious brightness, than from that noted oracle, *Let the elders, that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour*; **ESPECIALLY**, *they who labour in word and doctrine* (d). The ruling elders here mentioned necessarily pertain to the church. The whole epistle is writ to Timothy, to direct him how to *behave in the church of the living God*; and its directions are to be kept *till the day of Jesus Christ* (e). Here two sorts of elders are plainly distinguished: some that only *rule well*; others that also *labour in word and doctrine*.

(a) 1 Cor. xii. 28. Eph. iv. 11. (b) Matth. xxviii. 19. Rev. i. 4. 5. (c) 1 Cor. xii. 28. (d) 1 Tim. v. 17. (e) 1 Tim. iii. 15. and vi. 14.

Not one place is in the New Testament, nor perhaps in any Greek author, where the word *MALISTA*, here rendered *ESPECIALLY*, does not distinguish between different persons or things (*a*). How absurd then to imagine, it does not distinguish here! The ruling elders, who labour not in word and doctrine, are here divinely commended, and have a reward of double honour assigned them: but, if it were their duty, *to labour in word and doctrine*; how could God commend, or charge them to have *double honour* given them, while, however well they ruled, they neglected, or slothfully performed, the principal part of their work; did not diligently labour in word and doctrine? Is, my friend, the laborious apostle, and the Holy Ghost, who inspired him, turned advocates for the lazy preacher; or for him, who, like the diocesan bishops, rules, *WELL* I say not; but labours not in word and doctrine. The manifold torture, this text hath suffered, to wrest it from the native sense just now given, serves almost only to display, what enmity men have to the truth. Their shiftings I dismiss, as unworthy of regard.

The ruling elder not being called to preach the mysteries of Christ; it is not absolutely necessary, he possess the same degree of *aptness to teach*, as the presbyter, who *labours in word and doctrine*. As to every other qualification, neither scripture nor reason appear to plead any difference. No scripture I have observed hints their election or ordination to differ from that of the pastor; nor that in matters of ecclesiastic rule, they have either more or less authority than he. The same manner of holy conversation, watching over the flock, impartial receiving of members, warning and censuring the unruly, visiting and praying over the sick, is required of them (*b*).

In the whole sacred record, nothing is more clear than the divine appointment of deacons. In the apostolic history, as has been already declared, on another subject, we are informed of the occasion, the manner of entrance, and the end of their office (*c*). At Philippi the inspired

(*a*) Gal. vi. 20. Phil. iv. 22. 1 Tim. iv. 10. and v. 8. 2 Tim. iv. 13. Tit. i. 11. 2 Pet. ii. 10. Acts xx. 38. and xxvi. 3.

(*b*) 1 Tim. v. 17. Acts xx. 31. 35. Jam. v. 17. (*c*) Acts vi. 1.-6. See Let. 10th.



epistle finds and approves them in function, Phil. i. 1. In his missive to his beloved Timothy, the same inspired apostle prescribes their necessary qualifications (a). In a forecited text, their office is divinely approven, and the manner of distributing the church's store prescribed. *He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity* (b). In another, by their designation of HELPS, their usefulness is sufficiently marked (c). They ought to be *men of honest report*, full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom and gravity. They are to be set up in the church by the choice of the people, and ordination by the ministers of Christ. Their business is to serve tables, inspect the case of, and provide for the poor, and manage the temporal affairs of the church (d). In managing these, their power is the very same, with that of the pastor and ruling elder.

Ruling elders and deacons indeed are not equally necessary with pastors, to the very existence of the Christian church: yet both are appointed, without any hint, that their office is temporary: both are appointed upon moral grounds, equally respecting every Christian period: the necessity of ruling the church; of supplying the poor; and serving tables, still continue: both are appointed, amid rules to be *kept till the day of Jesus Christ* (e). Both the offices ought, therefore, to be continued distinct, till the end of time.

### LETTER XIII.

**T**HE nature, the conveyance, the partition, and exercise of the power, committed by Jesus to these pastors, ruling elders, and deacons, must next be examined. If his *kingdom is not of this world*, the whole authority pertaining thereto must be, not of a temporal, but *spiritual* kind (f). Its rule is not the carnal statutes of men; but the *spiritual* oracles of the Holy Ghost (g). It is not derived from any carnal earthly potentate; but

(a) 1 Tim. iii. 8.---12. (b) Rom. xii. 8. (c) 1 Cor. xii. 28.  
 (d) Acts vi. 1.---6. 1 Tim. iii. 3. 12. (e) 1 Tim. iii. with vi.  
 14. (f) John xv. 1. 36. (g) 1 Tim. iii. 14. 15. 2 Tim.  
 iii. 15.---17.

from the quickening *Spirit*, Jesus Christ the Lord (*a*). Its matter is *spiritual*; the keys, order, and government, not of a carnal and earthly monarchy; but *of the kingdom of heaven* (*b*). The doctrines preached relate not to human science; but are *spiritual* and divine (*c*). The sacraments confirm no carnal privileges; but represent, seal, and apply Jesus' *spiritual* person, righteousness, and benefits (*d*). The discipline is not carnal, affecting the body, purse, or outward privilege; but *spiritual*, respecting the soul and conscience; whereby the unruly are admonished and rebuked; the obstinate ejected from the spiritual fellowship of saints, and the penitent received to the same (*e*). The manner of exercising this power is *spiritual*; not in the name of a creature; but of Jesus the eternal Spirit, whose *kingdom is not of this world* (*f*). In respect of its subject, it is not intrusted to civil and earthly rulers; but to *spiritual* officers given to the church, by her head (*g*). In respect of its object, it is versant about persons, not as men of this world; but as spiritual members of Christ's mystical body. Discipline is versant about civil actions, not as political crimes; but as offensive to God, scandalous, and ruining to the souls of men (*h*). In its scope, this power tends not to increase mens wealth, or outward honours; but to gain their souls to Christ, destroy their corruption or flesh, and to save their spirit (*i*).

Is the government of the Christian church, of such a spiritual nature? how wicked then to admit to her offices, these, no way marked with the Spirit of Christ! How wicked to pervert her ordinances, ruling her in a political manner; instigate by carnal motives, and according to the edicts of princes, acts of parliament, or inclinations of men! - How criminal to dispense her sacred seals to any; to multitudes; destitute of every shadow of spiritual membership, in the mystical body of Christ!

(*a*) Matth. xxviii. 18.--20. John xx. 21.--23. Matth. xvi. 19. and xviii. 15.--20. (*b*) Matth. xvi. 19. (*c*) 2 Pet. i. 19. 20. 2 Tim. iii. 16. 17. (*d*) Rom. iv. 11. and v. 6. 1 Cor. x. 16. 17. (*e*) Matth. xvi. 19. and xviii. 15.--20. 1 Cor. v. 13. 2 Cor. ii. 1.--7. John xx. 21.--23. (*f*) Acts xvii. 18. Matth. xxviii. 19. 1 Cor. v. 4. (*g*) Eph. iv. 7.--11. Matth. xvi. 19. and xviii. 15.--20. (*h*) 1 Cor. v. 12. 13. 2 Cor. x. 8. (*i*) Eph. iv. 11.--15. 1 Cor. v. 5.

How sinful to impose the sacred supper under civil penalties; or to qualify men for offices in the state! What a shocking transformation this, of that kingdom, which is not of this world!

This spiritual power, derived from Jesus, is but of a ministerial, a stewardly kind. In the church, *one is our MASTER and LAWGIVER, even Christ*. His officers are no more than *stewards* of the mysteries of God; *ministers*, preachers, or *heralds*, and *ambassadors* for him (a). Not the smallest degree have they of power, to affix a new or additional sense to his laws; nor in the most indifferent thing, to establish a new one; but solely to explain and apply his statutes, as the circumstances of his church require. *To his law and to his testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them* (b).

That church-officers derive this power from Christ, not through the mediation of saints, magistrates, or diocesan bishops, but immediately from himself, is no less clearly marked in the sacred page. Already it has been illustrate, that neither saints, magistrates, nor diocelans, as such, are vested with any ecclesiastic power by Jesus Christ (c). They can therefore no more convey it to others, than I can dispoise the dukedom of—to my son. In ordinary cases, our adored Redeemer indeed useth the choice of his adult members, to point out the candidate fit to receive church-power (d): but the power, the office, he himself conveys. To the saints, the inspired Paul thus addresses himself, *Our authority, which the LORD hath given us, for your edification* (e). Not any deputed by him, but the Lord himself, gives his officers the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*; the power of church-order and government. Thus he makes them *stewards* in his house; *heralds* in his kingdom. It is God that *SETS* them in the church, makes them over-seers and rulers over others *in the Lord* (f). The ministerial power is so far from flowing from the church, that,

(a) Matth. xxiii. 8. 10. Jam. iv. 10. 1 Cor. iv. 1. Col. ii. 7. Rom. x. 14. 2 Cor. v. 19. 20. (b) Is. viii. 20. (c) Let. 5th, 6th, 7th. (d) Let. 10th. (e) 2 Cor. x. 8. (f) Matth. xvi. 19. and xviii. 18.---20. and xxviii. 18.---20. John xx. 21.---23. 1 Cor. xii. 28. Acts xx. 28. 1 Thess. v. 12.



in part, it is prior to her existence. The apostles were ordained to found New-Testament churches, when, and where there was none. Ministers business is partly calculate to gather churches out of the world; to call them to Jesus, who are not members of his mystical body (*a*). The characters imposed on church-officers confirm this point. They are called *ambassadors*, preachers or *heralds*, *stewards*, *rulers over others in the Lord*, &c. (*b*). Finally, to these officers, not to saints, magistrates, or diocesans, hath Jesus immediately directed the rules of their management; that they *judge only of these that are within the church*; that they *domineer not over the church*; that they *ordain, lay hands on, no man suddenly*; *do nothing by partiality*; that they *rebuke scandalous sinners openly, reject obstinate heretics*, &c. (*c*). To them he immediately directs the promises of his special presence, direction, support, in their work; and of his ratification of it; and his rewarding them for their faithful discharge of it. To them he immediately directs the threatenings of punishment, for mismanaging it (*d*).

But how is this church-power parted, and to be execute?—How are these *keys of the kingdom of heaven* distribute? That of order or knowledge, comprehending the preaching of the gospel, and administration of the sacraments, is allotted only to ministers. They only are the *elders, who labour in word and doctrine*: and to each of them, this power equally pertains, and is to be exercised by him, in his congregation (*e*). The key of jurisdiction relative to the admission of members, ordination of officers, censuring the unruly, casting out the obstinate, and absolving the penitent, pertaining equally to pastors and ruling elders, is to be exercised in sacred courts, consisting of two or more of these church-rulers, constitute in the name of the Lord Jesus (*f*).

Were it possible the whole members of the militant church could unite in one congregation, the very light of

(*a*) Matth. xvi. 19. and xxviii. 19. 20. Mark xvi. 15.---20. John xx. 21.---23. (*b*) Rom. x. 14. 1 Cor. iv. 1. 1 Thess v. 12.

(*c*) 1 Cor. v. 12. 1 Pet. v. 3. 1 Tim. v. 20. 21. 22. Tit iii. 10.

(*d*) Matth. xxviii. 20. and xvi. 19. and xviii. 15.---20. Luke xii. 42. Rev. ii. 12.---20. (*e*) 1 Tim. v. 17. (*f*) Matth.

xviii. 18.---20. 1 Cor. v. 4. Acts xv.

nature imports, they should have but one judicature over them. But since, continuing *one mystical body of Christ*, their number and distance enforce their disjunction into various worshipping assemblies; it is requisite they have over them, judicatures, supreme and subordinate; **THESE**, to manage their less important affairs; **THAT**, to maintain their union, and order their more general and momentous concerns. In three different courts of judgment, it is supposed, church-officers may meet in their Master's name. In a congregational **SESSION**, composed of one or more ministers, with ruling elders and deacons. In a classical **PRESBYTERY**, composed of ministers and elders from several congregations, associate together for mutual rule. And in a **SYNOD** provincial, national, or general, composed of ministers and elders, from several presbyterial associations. The divine warrant of those courts must be narrowly examined (a).

#### L E T T E R   X I V .

**T**HAT congregational sessions have a divine warrant, is thus instructed. The very light of nature directs us to determine smaller causes, by a smaller court. When Jethro proposed, inferior judges in Israel should determine the easier causes; Moses, and God by him, approved the motion, and execute the same (b). Threatening punishment on our sinful anger, and wrathful expressions, Jesus plainly approves the Jewish inferior courts, for causes less important (c). In the Christian form of church discipline prescribed by him, the finishing phrase, *Let him be unto thee as an Heathen man and publican*, clearly alludes to the Jewish form of procedure in scandals (d). They had rulers, and consequently courts in every synagogue, or worshipping congregation (e). By virtue of missives from the high priest, to these Saul had free access to punish the Christians,

(a) Matth. xviii. 18. 1 Tim. iv. 14. Acts xv. (b) Exod. xviii. 22. 26. (c) Matth. v. 22. (d) Matth. xviii. 15--18. (e) Mark v. 35--38. Luke viii. 41. and xiii. 14. Acts xlii. 15. and xviii. 8. 17.

in every synagogue (a). To these KAHALS, or congregational courts, it pertained to eject from the synagogue; and order transgressors to be held for *Heathen men and publicans* (b). To these KAHALS therefore, and their procedure, Jesus here alludes. But why, unless he would intimate, that similar courts should be in every Christian congregation? In this form of discipline, our adored Saviour marks his utmost aversion to have offences propalled. If one can remove them by himself; it is best of all. If this secret attempt succeeds not; not above *one or two more* are to be taken along; that if possible, the offence may not be blazed abroad. The church, therefore, to which the offence is to be told, after private admonition is fruitless, must be understood in the privatest sense of the word. The following context imports, that it is a CHURCH, which may consist but of *two or three* met together in Christ's name. It is notwithstanding a church having power to *bind and loose* from censure; that is, a church possessed of the *keys of the kingdom of heaven* (c). It cannot then be the whole congregation, who are not calculate to conceal offences; who ordinarily consist of hundreds, or thousands, and to whom, Christ, as hath been evinced, has given no judicial power (d).

That particular congregations are called CHURCHES, has been sufficiently marked. We read not merely of the CHURCH, but also of the CHURCHES, or particular congregations, at Corinth, and other places; of a CHURCH in an upper room; of a CHURCH in the house of Aquila; of Nymphas; of Philemon (e). We read that the apostles took care to *ordain elders in every church*: that these were such, as *rule well*, and others, who also *labour in word and doctrine*, has been illustrate (f). Now, to what purpose, should these be ordained in EVERY CHURCH, except they were to meet in a court, for joint rule thereof?

In fine, the invincible law of necessity requires such a court. *Offences must needs come: order should be main-*

(a) Acts ix. 1. 2. (b) John ix. 22. (c) Matth. xviii. 20.  
 19. with chap. xvi. 19. (d) Letter 5th. (e) 1 Cor. xiv. 34.  
 and xvi. 19. Col. iv. 15. Phil. 2. (f) Acts xiv. 23. 1 Tim.  
 v. 17. Letter 10th. 12th.



tained (a). But how fatiguing; how impossible for Christians, in every matter of judicature, to attend presbyteries or synods; perhaps far distant? A single congregation of Christians too may be so situate, amid Heathens or heretics, as to have no access to either of these courts. Without a congregational judicature, how then could they be governed? Or, suppose the whole church reduced to one congregation; how could it be governed without a congregational court? Should I observe, that necessity obliges its inveterate enemies, to substitute in its place a shadow thereof; *the conventions of their church-wardens?*

## LETTER XV.

NO less strongly, Sir, pleads the light of nature for the classical presbytery. The trial, the ordination, and deposition of pastors; the dispensing of more solemn censure; the judicial decision of controversies, which deeply concern the welfare of different congregations, it shews too hard, except in case of extreme necessity, to be managed by the rulers of ONE. Experience teacheth us, that congregational elderships are generally too weak, to examine pastors for ordination; too weak, to refute or judge a subtle heretic; too weak, to determine some intricate cases. Controversies may happen, which a session cannot compose. A particular member may judge their determination so wrong, that he cannot submit. The session may be equally divided against itself. The session and congregation may fall by the ears. Offenders in one particular act, may be partly in one, partly in another congregation. An important dispute between two or more congregations may happen. How shall these points be comfortably settled, except pastors and ruling elders from different congregations concur in judging thereof?

The unity of all particular Christian congregations, as one mystical *body of Christ*, natively infers, that uni-

(a) Matth. xviii. 7.---20. 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

ty and fellowship among them should be carried to the highest (a). By the express mention of a presbytery employed in the ordination of Timothy (b); by exhibiting various patterns of one presbytery governing a multiplicity of congregations, the scripture plainly determines the divine right of this classical court. Waving others, let the instances of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth, be considered.

A number of Christian congregations, or worshipping assemblies at Jerusalem, there certainly was. To the *hundred and twenty* present at the election of Matthias, Peter's pentecostal sermon to the *dwellers at Jerusalem*, added *three thousand* more: just after, believers were *daily added to the church*. At another sermon by Peter, *many believed, and the number was about five thousand*. Soon after, *multitudes were added to the Lord*. Quickly after, *the disciples multiplied greatly; and a great number of the priests were obedient to the Christian faith* (c). By this time, Sir, you cannot suppose the Christians fewer than twenty or forty thousand. A persecution instigate by Saul, made havock of these, and scattered many abroad: yet about twenty years after, there were *MANY thousands*, Greek, *TEN THOUSANDS*, who did *believe, and were zealous of the law* (d). It is impossible, these *MANY TEN THOUSANDS* could be fewer than 40,000; perhaps more than the double. Now whatever may be said of their preaching in Solomon's porch, or courts of the temple; they had no place but private houses to receive the sacred supper (e). What private house was sufficient to contain these forty or eighty thousand, while they met to eat it, on every first day of the week? None certainly. They behoved then to divide into a great many particular assemblies. That they did so, is further evident from the number of their teachers. Besides a number of prophets and presbyters, the twelve apostles, for sundry years, continued mostly at Jerusalem; preaching and dispensing the sacraments (f). Can

(a) Rom. xii. 6. Eph. iv. 4---6. 1 Cor. xii. 12---27. (b) 1 Tim. iv. 14. (c) Acts i. 15. and ii. 41. 47. and iv. 4. and v. 14. and vi. 7. (d) Acts viii. 1---3. and xxi. 20. (e) Acts ii. 46. and xii. 12. and xix. 9. and xx. 8. and xxviii. 30. 31. Rom. xvi. 5. (f) Acts i. 26. and ii. 14. 42. and iv. 31---37. and vi. 2. and viii. 14. and xv. 2.

one, in his wits, imagine, these laborious teachers, who had *the world* for their province, idled away their time, so long, with a single congregation? The Christians too, at Jerusalem, were very distinguished in language; Roman, Cretian, Cappadocian, Arabian, Persian, Median, &c (a). Infers not this, their being ordinarily taught in different assemblies?

At Antioch, a GREAT NUMBER *believed*. While Barnabas afterward preached there, MUCH *people was added to the Lord*. So mightily the believers multiplied, that they were there *first called Christians* (b). Here too was a great number of teachers: first divers of Cyprus and Cyrene: then came Barnabas: finding still too much work, he brought *Paul thither also*. There came after, *prophets from Jerusalem*. Paul and Barnabas continued there teaching, *with many others also* (c). Where were so many believers to assemble to ordinances, without any pretence to a *Solomon's porch* for preaching in; where were so many laborious teachers; who can doubt of a variety of worshipping assemblies?

At Ephesus, the word of God *grew mightily, and prevailed*; *multitudes heard it*, and the name of Jesus *was magnified*. To preach the Christian faith, a *great door and effectual was opened*. Many *confessed their sinful deeds*. Many others burnt their magical books, to the value of *fifty thousand pieces of silver* (d). Here, encouraged with his great success, Paul continued above two years. Here he conferred the gift of tongues upon twelve disciples that prophesied. When he passed this way some time after, here was a considerable number of presbyters or bishops; which he convened at Miletus. *He prayed with them ALL*: and *they ALL wept sore* (e). How could these numerous Christians be disposed of; these teachers employed; and these tongues used; without a variety of congregations?

At Corinth, Paul preached a year and an half: *many believed, and were baptized*. Besides these, perhaps the Lord had MUCH *people in that city* (f). Here was a variety

(a) Acts ii. 5. 12. (b) Acts xi. 21. 24. 26. (c) Acts xi. 20. 23. 26 and xiii. 1.---3. and xv. 35. (d) Acts xix. 8. 10. 17.---20. 1 Cor. xvi. 8. 9. (e) Acts xix. 1.---10. and xx. 17. 28. 36. 37. (f) Acts xviii. 8. ---10.



of teachers, *two or three*, to speak, and *others* to judge. Here was a variety of *tongues*, and of CHURCHES to use them; and in which their women were enjoined to keep silence (*a*). Who now can doubt of a variety of worshipping congregations?

That a variety of Christian congregations was at Jerusalem, at Antioch, at Ephesus, and Corinth, has been demonstrate. Yet, these at Jerusalem are divinely marked, to have been ONE CHURCH: so these at Antioch; so these at Ephesus; and in fine these at Corinth (*b*). How were these distinct churches or worshipping assemblies ONE CHURCH? Not merely in union to Christ, and mutual affection one to another; for so, all saints are ONE, whether in heaven or in earth. Not in respect of joint fellowship in one place, at the supper of the Lord, as has been just now evinced. And therefore one CHURCH, in virtue of conjunct government under ONE presbytery. The ecclesiastic officers of these cities are marked to have been the common governors of the one CHURCH, constitute of these different congregations. So at Jerusalem (*c*), at Antioch (*d*), at Ephesus (*e*), at Corinth (*f*). For acts of ecclesiastic government, to take care of the churches *temporal*, but *sacred* store, and distribution thereof; to ordain and send forth other officers; to excommunicate obstinate offenders; to restore penitents; the rulers of these associate churches assembled together (*g*). To shew their meetings designed for a pattern to after ages, the infallibly inspired apostles, sometimes called *elders*, *presbyters*, here sat on a level with other rulers; reasoned, voted, and meddled with nothing, beyond the reach and power of ordinary PRESBYTERS (*h*).

(*a*) 1 Cor. xiv. 20. 26. 29. 34. (*b*) Acts i. and xiii. 1. Rev. ii. 1. 1 Cor. i. 2. (*c*) Acts xi. 27. 30. and xv. 2. (*d*) Acts xiii. 1.---3. and xv. 35. (*e*) Acts xx. 17. 28. (*f*) 1 Cor. i. 12. and iv. 15. and xiv. 29. (*g*) Acts iv. 35. 37. and xi. 30. and vi. 1.---6. and xiii. 1.---3. 1 Cor. v. 4. 13. 2 Cor. ii. 6.---9. (*h*) 1 Pet. v. 1. 3 John 1. Acts vi. 1.---6. and xv.

## L E T T E R X V I.

**M**ight not, Amelius, the divine right of a synod, be argued from the ecclesiastic Sanhedrim, or national council, of the Jewish church? That this was different from the high civil court of the kingdom, their different presidents and work, in the reign of Jehoshaphat, without more ado, may evince. This had the supreme power of declaring obstinate transgressors to be held as *Heathen men and publicans*. To this therefore Jesus, in his form of Christian discipline, may be supposed, partly, to allude (a). Might not the divine warrant of this court be pled, from the general hints of inspiration; that *two are better than one*; that *in the multitude of counsellors there is safety*; that the *spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets* (b)? The law of necessity too, unanswerably pleads it. Not only the people of various worshipping assemblies, but of different classical associations; nay, a whole presbytery, is in hazard of being actually infected with heresy, idolatry, corruption; or may have a controversy with, and have given actual offence, to their brethren around: shall there be no remedy; no superior court, no church, to tell the matter to, for redress? In the sacred record, how oft are the whole professors of the Christian faith, represented as **ONE CHURCH**, built upon Christ; and herself the *pillar and ground of truth*; **ONE BODY** of Christ to which all church-officers are divinely *set*; to whose use they are *given* by Christ; and to which we must *give none offence* (c)? Infers not this **ONENESS**, this relation of all officers to the catholic church; that, if possible, the **ONE CHURCH**, **ONE BODY**, ought to be governed by **ONE COURT**; that if increase of members inforce a division, into various congregations, these should be subject to **ONE presbytery**: and if further increase inforce a distinction, into various

(a) 2 Chron. xix. 11. Matth. xviii. 18. (b) Eccles. iv. 9. Prov. xi. 14. 1 Cor. xiv. 32. (c) Matth. xvi. 18. 1 Tim. iii. 15. Eph. iv. 4 11. 12. 1 Cor. xii. 12. 28. and x. 32.

presbyterial associations, these, if possible, should unite in subjection to ONE synod?

Nothing more plainly illustrates the divine warrant of ecclesiastical synods, than the apostolic pattern thereof; a pattern, which documents there are scandals *not possibly* removed by any particular congregation on earth. This meeting at Jerusalem, about eighteen years after the death of our Lord, was occasioned by the PROPER CAUSE *of a synod*. Pretending a commission from the apostles, some heretical teachers came down from Jerusalem, to Antioch in Syria, and the places adjacent. By teaching that circumcision, and the observance of other branches of the ceremonial law, continued necessary to salvation; they *subverted* some, and *troubled* other members of the churches there. After much unsuccessful disputing, Paul, Barnabas, and others, were delegate *to Jerusalem, to the apostles, and elders, concerning this matter (a)*.

PROPER MEMBERS *of a synod* here convened, to consider this question. The apostles and elders at Jerusalem: Paul, Barnabas, and others from Antioch: no doubt other commissioners from Syria and Cilicia, where they were troubled with the false teachers; and to whom *the decrees were sent (b)*. In vain, I hear, that not merely church-officers, but the whole body of Christian professors were judges on that occasion: the *brethren*, the *whole church*, the whole *multitude*. For it has been demonstrate, no part of church authority is lodged in her private members (c). Women, real members, a real part of the whole church, and Christian multitude, are divinely forbid to speak in the church (d). Should it therefore be granted, the whole body of Christians were gathered to judge of this matter; the judgment of private members could amount to no more than the saints *judging the world*, or *judging of angels* doth (e); that is, an approbation of discrete judgment; without which, from the Christian multitude, I know not, if any judicatory on earth can to edification determine an intricate point of general concern. Should any still insist, the whole mul-

(a) Acts xv. 1. 2. 5. 23. 24. 41.

(b) Acts xv. 6.

(c) Let.

sth. (d) 1 Cor. xiv. 34.

(e) 1 Cor. vi. 2. 3.



titude of believers were actually convened to judge of this affair, equally with the apostles and elders: I beg he will inform me, where they obtained a PLACE, proper for so many ten thousands of judges, to reason and vote with distinctness. Did the inveterate Jews compliment them with Solomon's porch? or could it have been proper for the purpose? But that the brethren, who joined in judgment with the apostles and elders, were not private persons; but rather COMMISSIONERS from the troubled churches around, is evidently marked, in that *Judas and Silas*, two of them, were PREACHERS (a).

Here, as in a synod, every member, inspired, or not, acted by ORDINARY and EQUAL POWER, in the whole business laid before them: Paul an apostle, Barnabas a prophet, were as inferiors, delegate by the Antiochian church (b): the elders who convened had the same power as the apostles. To the elders, teaching or ruling, as well as *apostles*, was the matter referred. Elders, as well as apostles, convened to consider it. In the decision, elders, as well as apostles, say, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us*. Elders, as well as apostles, imposed the *necessary things* upon the churches, Elders, as well as apostles, authoritatively determined the decrees. By elders, as well as apostles, were the false teachers judicially marked with the infamous brand of TROUBLERS and SUBVERTERS of souls. In the name of the elders, as well as apostles, the letters of the meeting, containing their decision, were wrote to the churches. By elders, as well as apostles, were the messengers chosen, to deliver the decrees to those concerned. In short, this synod knew nothing of *elders being improper judges in matters of faith, and cases of conscience* (c). But why here did the inspired members put themselves on a level with others, if not to exhibit, to after-ages, an authoritative PATTERN?

Assembled together, the apostles and elders proceeded in the ORDINARY METHOD of synods. They examined the point, by much reasoning and dispute. In consequence of mature deliberation, they determined the que-

(a) Acts xv. 22.  
30. Acts xvi. 4.

(b) Acts xv. 2.

(c) Acts xv. 2. 6. 22. to

sion, and sent DECRETORY missives, with proper messengers, to the churches concerned. In their disputation, they argued from the oracles of God: on these they founded their decision; and hence therein say, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us (a)*. If it was not to constitute a PATTERN to after ages, how foolish; how absurd, for men inspired *to reason and dispute* on the affair! The sentence of one inspired was sufficient for decision.

In this convention, the apostles and elders *exerted* precisely the WHOLE POWER of a Christian synod. In opposition to the heresy taught, they, by a doctrinal decision, plainly declared, That obedience to the Mosaic law of ceremonies, was no more necessary. A first and second admonition not being rejected, they excommunicate not the heretics: but, to move the church to avoid them, they stigmatized them, *Troublers of the church, subverters of souls*. A decree for promoting decency and good order, they enacted; importing, that to avoid offence, the believing Gentiles should *abstain from fornication, things strangled, and blood (b)*.

In vain I hear it pretended, this meeting was merely consultative; their decision a mere advice. For what in it is rendered LAY UPON, ordinarily imports an *authoritative imposition*. The decision is expressly called a *necessary burden (c)*. It is called DECREES ORDAINED. The word rendered DECREES, every where, in the New Testament, imports *authoritative statutes*. The word rendered ORDAINED, when applied to assemblies, imports *authoritative decision*. Joined together, how nervously must they import the AUTHORITY of the decision, before us! the effect of the decision answered to authority, approved by Christ (d). Cheerfully the churches submitted to these DECREES; and were by them *confirmed in the faith, comforted in heart, and increased in number daily (e)*. Could my friend wish a more exact pattern of a synodical meeting? Or can he refuse, that

(a) Acts xv. 7.---30. (b) Acts xv. 24.---29. (c) Acts xv. 28. (d) Acts xv. 10. Matth. xxiii. 4. Acts xvi. 4. and xvii. 7. Luke ii. 1. Col. ii. 14. Eph. ii. 15. John xviii. 31. Acts xxiv. 6. (e) Acts xvi. 45. and xv. 31.

what was written aforetime, was written for our learning?

L E T T E R XVII.

**A**Lready, the divine warrant for ecclesiastic courts, SESSIONS, PRESBYTERIES, and SYNODS, has been demonstrate. By what means shall these judicatures be convened? what power belongs to each? are they subordinate, the former to the latter? are points now to be examined.

That civil magistrates have a power to call ecclesiastic synods, has, from the unerring oracles of Heaven, been instructed. In the church too, Jesus has lodged full power to convene such meetings. This is interwoven with her very constitution; nor man, nor angel, can deprive her of it; and at her peril she attempts to surrender it. To have power of government, without authority to convene a judicature to exercise it, is quite inconsistent. Under the Old Testament, magistrates, being often the churches friends, called sundry, if not most of her councils (*a*). During the period of New-Testament history, and for ages afterward, magistrates were open enemies to the church; she therefore called her own councils (*b*). As the members of synods are subjects of the magistrate, as well as of Christ; as their meeting is connected, in some degree, with the interests of the state, as well as of the church; it is most desirable, when church and state harmonize, in the convention of every such council.

When convened, these ecclesiastic judicatories have no power to interfere in any thing civil, as such. Christ's kingdom, whose officers they are, is *not of this world*. His pattern directs them to avoid *dividing and judging*, in any thing civil (*c*). Civil injuries however, not as ci-

(*a*) 2 Chron. xix. 8. . . . . and chap. xxix. and xxx. Matth. ii. 4. 5. (*b*) Acts vi. and xv. (*c*) John xviii. 36. Luke x. i. 14.



*villy hurtful*; but *as sinful, offensive, and scandalous*, come under their consideration (a). No church-court has power to enact new laws, properly so called; one being their MASTER and LAWGIVER, *even Christ*. To each of these courts pertains a power to call before them, whatever church-member under their inspection, the business to be considered concerns. To each pertains a power to hear and judge every cause regularly presented to them; and to admit, censure, and absolve, as is most conducive to edification. To congregational sessions, it pertains to inquire into the spiritual state of those under them; to admit to, or suspend from the sacred seals; to admonish, rebuke, and absolve, as is edifying (b). To PRESBYTERIES, it belongs to ordain pastors, and perhaps other church-officers; to excommunicate notorious offenders; and to manage and determine such affairs, as are too hard for the session (c). To SYNODS, it belongs ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to lay down rules for ordering the circumstances of the public worship of God, and the government of his church, according to the maxims prescribed in his word; and to receive complaints in case of maleadministration. The lawful sentences of these courts, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the inspired word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God (d).

But does the heavenly warrant bear, that sessions ought to be subordinate to PRESBYTERIES; and these to SYNODS? It certainly doth. The very light of nature teacheth me, that if there is an higher court, I may appeal to it, if wronged by an inferior. A subordination of judicatories, in the Hebrew church, is from scripture abundantly evident (e). Is our danger and necessity less than theirs? Or did Jesus leave them more complete remedies for their disorders? It were absurd to think the

(a) Matth. xviii. 15.--20. (b) Heb. xiii. 17. 1 Thess. v. 12. 13. Ezek. xxxiv. 4. Matth. vii. 6. 2 Thess. iii. 6. 14. 15. 1 Cor. xi. 27. Jude 23. (c) 1 Tim. iv. 14. 1 Cor. v. 4. 5. Matth. xviii. 15. - 20. (d) Acts xv. 15.--31. and xvi. 4. Matth. xviii. 17.--20. (e) Exod. xviii. 22--26. Deut. xvii. 9. 12. 2 Chron. xix. 8. 11.

one, or the other. The gradual ascent of managing offences, prescribed by himself, plainly confirms this subordination. His care for the whole church, cannot be less, than that for a single member. If then an inferior judicatory offend us, ought we not to carry the matter to these who have more influence and authority? If the offending judicatory neglect to hear this; ought not the offence to be told to the church in the highest sense of the word? Who knows not, that the Jewish church, whose forms are alluded to, and part of their rules quoted in this sacred *form of process*, was represented, not only in their synagogic courts, but chiefly in their ecclesiastic sanhedrim (a)? This subordination too, is farther evinced from the churches, the presbyterial associations, of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, &c. their referring an affair to the famous synod at Jerusalem, just now mentioned, and their readily submitting to its determination (b).

To deny this subordination of church-courts, is pregnant with the grossest absurdity. It would import, that whatever provision Jesus, her head, has made to check or redress lesser and personal evils; he has made none to redress the grosser; heresies, schisms, and scandals, wherein many are guilty. It would import, that a small congregation, perhaps of ten or twelve, convened by themselves, have more power, than when assembled with a variety of such congregations, and their rules; there being supposed in the former case a power of jurisdiction; in the latter, no more but simple deliberation and advice. It would import an almost utter impossibility, for the whole Christians in a kingdom to agree in any uniform plan of doctrine, worship, discipline, or government; each congregation being left to act entirely by itself. It would import, that every minister is pastor merely to his own congregation; and hence cannot go, as such, to another; or to propagate the gospel among Heathens and heretics. It would import the most absurd tyranny over the pastor; in that his whole doctrine and conduct shall be merely subject to the cognisance of his own elders, or people. And, in fine, that the inspired Paul quite mis-

(a) Matth. xviii. 18. Deut. xix 15. (b) Acts xv.

took himself, when he wrote, that *the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*

## L E T T E R XVIII.

**T**O prevent and redress the scandals of church-members, is one great end of her judicatures. No sin, however heinous, while it remains an absolute secret, can be a scandal. It tempts none to imitation. It can grieve the heart of none but the guilty. Every open and plain violation of the divine law, by omission or commission, is scandalous: voluntary gross ignorance of divine truth; apostacy from it; denial of the being of God; contempt of his word; neglect of his instituted worship; idolatry; superstition; blasphemy; profanation of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, words, or works; breach of the Sabbath by idleness, carnal employments, or recreations; want of natural affection; cruelty; malice; murder; drunkenness; unchastity; covetousness; fraud; lying; reviling, and the like (a). To impose indifferent things, as necessary, in religion: to do things indifferent, as the *eating of flesh*, if it tend to the tempting of others to sin; or if it grieve the godly; and produce contention and disorder; is scandalous, sinful, and murderous (b). Prayer, fasting, and other things good in themselves, may be rendered offensive in their circumstances, cause, manner, instrument, place, or time (c); as prayer by a man drunk, or in the streets, &c. When *the doing*, and *the not doing*, of any thing not commanded of God, tends to offend on either side; the character and number of the persons offended may be of some use to determine our conduct: but generally it is safest to forbear *DOING*. By this means we are passive, in what offence is taken; in the other we should be active.

The method of procedure, with scandalous offenders, is clear. If the offence be known to but one, or a few; sc-

(a) 1C. xxvii. 11. Hos. iv. 1. 2. 1 Cor. v. 11. and vi 9. 10. Gal. v. 19. 2 Thess. i. 6. 2 Tim. iii. 1. 15. (c) Rom. xiv. 1 Cor. viii. (c) Matth. vi. 5. 16. 1C. lviii. 4. 5.



cretly is he, or they, with Christian meekness, plainness, and love, to *tell the offender his fault*. If hearkening, he profess his sorrow, and resolution to amend; carefully must the whole affair be concealed, the once offended, with pleasure reflecting, their offending brother is gained. If, after one or more such secret reproofs, he continues impenitent, and defending his fault; one or two more Christian brethren, grave, sagacious, and meek, are to be taken along; and the offender dealt with, by, and in their presence. If now, he appear to repent, the several persons concerned in his reproof, are with care and pleasure to cover his crime; lest, by divulging it, they render themselves wicked reproachers. If the offender condemn one or more such private reproofs; or if his scandal be of such a nature, as will necessarily become public; the affair is to be dilated to the church judicatory, to which he is most immediately subject. To bring him to a due sense of his fault, he is to be there dealt with, in a manner prudent, affectionate, plain, convincing. If after manifold such dealing of the judicatures, he remain obstinate, he is to be *delivered up unto Satan, for the destruction of his flesh*, or sinful corruption, *that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*; he is to be cast out from the church, and held as *an Heathen man and publican*: under which sentence *ratified in heaven*, if he die impenitent, it appears impossible he can escape the damnation of hell (a). Such ecclesiastic censures are necessary to reclaim offending brethren; necessary to deter others from the like offences; necessary to purge out the leaven of infectious scandals, which might otherwise leaven the whole lump, the whole church; necessary to vindicate the honour of Christ, and holy profession of the gospel; and to prevent the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon churches, should they suffer his covenant, and seals thereof, to be profaned, by notorious offenders (b).

In the case of the incestuous Corinthian, we have a distinct procedure unto excommunication (c). Nothing appears extraordinary in the whole affair. It is not extra-

(a) Matth. xviii. 15.—18. (b) 1 Cor. v. 1 Tim. v. 20.  
Matth. vii. 6. 1 Tim. i. 20. 1 Cor. xi. 27.—34. Jude 23.  
(c) 1 Cor. v. and 2 Cor. ii. 5.—8.

ordinary, an unwary professor should fall into the most scandalous crime; nor, that his obstinacy should render it necessary for the honour of God, and the purity of the church, to cast him out from her fellowship, till he mark his repentance.

To the rulers of the Corinthian church, met in the name of their head, is the whole affair apostolically committed. By not the **ALL**; but the **MANY**, or **CHIEF ONES** (*a*), as the word may be rendered; it, in other places of the sacred volume, being translated **BETTER**, **MORE**, **GREATER** (*b*); was this sentence, this punishment, inflicted. To inflict such censure, however, there must be a pretty general consent of private Christians; otherwise it will be to little purpose. They will not withdraw from the company of the excommunicated. The delivery of a scandalous person, obstinate in his wickedness, to Satan, is no extraordinary thing; is no giving him up to be tormented of the devil, as several have fancied. It imports no more, but an ejection from the church, the visible kingdom of Christ, into the world, the visible kingdom and family of Satan. The gathering of men to the church is called a turning them from Satan to God. The ejection of them must therefore be a redelivery of them to Satan. Here is no hint of bodily torment; but of the Corinthians casting out from their church-fellowship, that *wicked* **PERSON**; and of much grief in him, as the fruit of it. The case of the damned for ever, marks, that Satan's torment of the body tends not to the saving of the soul. Besides, a man's body is not destroyed, but saved in the day of the Lord, as well as his penitent soul. In fine, if the affair had been miraculous, how could the inspired Paul reprove the Corinthians, for not doing it sooner? or how could he call them to do it forthwith? Working of miracles was none of their business.

To render a man excommunicable by us, necessarily supposes his connection with us in church-fellowship. To cast out these never in immediate Christian communion with us; or, to pretend to deliver corruptions to Satan, as if they had been church-members, and Satan a purger

(*a*) 2 Cor. ii. 6.      (*b*) Matth. vi. 25. Mark xii. 38. 43. Matth. xii. 41. 42.

from sin; is too ridiculous to deserve a confutation. To render one excommunicable, he must be obstinately scandalous. No where doth Jesus allow us to reject the most notorious *heretic*, till he has contemned a *first and second admonition* (a). To excommunicate the apparently penitent, how gross soever their crime, is to misrepresent the gospel; overthrow the design of the sentence; and reject these, we have reason to believe the Lord Christ has received. A prudential suspension from the sacred seals, which some call the lesser excommunication, even of a penitent offender, for a time, may indeed be necessary to promote edification. But no warrant from God, under pretence of deterring others, or vindicating the church, to cast out such an one unto Satan, appears marked in the sacred volume. Divine ordinances are too important, to be made bugbears. Nor can it be a dishonour for a church, to embrace a penitent, who, in the judgment of charity, is purged by Christ.

To render one a proper object of excommunication, his offence must be a sin, condemned by the light of nature, or the plain declaration of the Holy Ghost: such a sin, as the divine Spirit witnesseth, men cannot be saved in a course of; *for the works of the flesh are manifest*. Never doth the scripture instance its infliction, but where the original scandal was glaringly wicked; incest, blasphemy (b), &c. In matters of doubtful disputation, Christians are required to bear one with another. In these, a sensible and conscientious person may be incapable to discern his mistake: and so can never be truly obstinate therein. To apply this tremendous censure, where the libelled offences are not, cannot be made evident to be sinful, to every indifferent beholder, is to frustrate the end of the sentence, and bring it to contempt. People cannot conscientiously withdraw from the person, where they cannot see his offence to be a real and plain breach of the divine law. It tends to blast the success of ecclesiastical discipline; tempting these who deserve, to ridicule it. In the Saviour's name, it prostitutes his ordinance into a cursed engine of partiality, cruelty, pride, hatred, and spiritual murder of brethren; perhaps dear to Christ.

(a) Tit. iii. 10.

(b) 1 Cor. v. 1 Tim. i. 20.



Not only must the offence be notoriously sinful; but the fact must be proven, by the judicial confession of the party, or the testimony of two or three witnesses, proper for the purpose (*a*). Repeated admonition, attended with patient expectation of success, must be duly premised (*b*). To neglect, and especially to refuse converse with the supposed offender, upon the subject of his alleged offence, argues a murderous unconcern, and a malicious fear, lest the sentence should be prevented by repentance. With evident kindness and compassion to the offender, must the admonitions be given, and the case of obstinacy judged in. Without this, his spirit is provoked, and the whole amounts to a murdering his soul and character, in the name of Jesus Christ.

This sentence is to be administered, with solemn and earnest prayer: without this, it is but a rash, a profane curse (*c*). With tender compassion to the offender, and deep sorrow and lamentation over his crime; under a solemn impress of the future judgment, which it represents, and to which the administrators must quickly account; it must be dispensed. With affectionate concern, and earnest prayer for his recovery; and dealing with his conscience as occasion offers; but, declining all common converse with him, as far as natural relation permits; must it be followed (*d*). Without these, be his crimes as they will, our infliction of the censure, can but amount, to an hateful destruction of our brother, in the Saviour's name.

Should this dreadful censure be justly incurred; no carnal motive, no consideration of trouble, to the object, or dispensers, should stop it. Let the ordinance of God be betrayed for no carnal advantage. But, from the inspired apostle's giving no advice to the Galatian and Corinthian churches, to excommunicate the heretics and false apostles, while in great vogue, and followed by many; whom, notwithstanding, he wished cut off, and was in readiness to REVENGE, when the obedience of these churches should be fulfilled; it appears manifest, that, while deservants of this censure, have a strong

(*a*) Matth. xviii. 16. (*b*) Tit. iii. 19. (*c*) 1 Cor. v. 4.  
 (*d*) 1 Cor. v. 2. 2 Cor. xii. 2. Matth. xviii. 18. 1 Cor. v. 11.  
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party in the church, it is not for edification to inflict it (a).

# L E T T E R X I X.

**T**O maintain the peace, and purity of the church, is to be earnestly intended, by every member thereof. To purchase peace, unity, and mutual affection among his people, the divine Saviour laid down his life (b); he pleads it in his unceasing intercession (c); he promises it in his word (d); the purchased peace, he bequeathed to his church (e). Nothing is more warmly recommended in his oracles, than to exert ourselves, *praying for*, and every other way promoting *the peace of Jerusalem* (f). Nothing is represented as more plainly hurtful to men, or dishonouring to God, that contention and division in the church (g). It springs from ignorance, selfishness, pride, passion, jealousy, neglect of important duties, stiff peremptoriness and the like (h). It marks the anger of the Lord (i). It eats out the life of religion; produces reviling, confusion, and every evil work. It mudders, it tears asunder, the mystical body of an adored Redeemer, and hinders others to join her: how shocking the crime!

That there may be union and communion, with ministers and Christians, who, in many things not fundamental, differ from us; and who are chargeable with many imperfections, infirmities, and faults, personal; with a church where sundry scandals are not confessed; and where not a few corruptions in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, are entertained, but not imposed for approbation, the man acquaint with the oracles of God, must readily grant. Many and grievous, were the

(a) Gal. v. 12. 2 Cor. x. 6. 3 John 10. (b) Eph. ii. 15. 16. Col. i. 20. (c) John xiv. 27. (d) John xvii. 11. 21. 23. (e) Jer. xxxii. 39. Ezek. xi. 19. and xxxvii. 17. (f) Rom. xii. 9. 10. 16. 18. Heb. xiii. 1. and xii. 14. Rom. xv. 1. 6. Eph. iv. 2. 3. 32. Psal. cxxii. 6. and cxxxiii. Zech. viii. 19. (g) Jam. iii. 15. 16. 1 Cor. iii. 1. Mark iii. 24. (h) Rom. xv. 1. 2. Prov. xiii. 10. and xv. 8. and x. 12. (i) Lam. iv. 16.

corruptions at *Corinth*; *Galatia*; *Pergamos*; *Thyatira*; *Sardis*; and *Laodicea*. For these, God sharply rebukes them, in their respective epistles: but, because not obstinate in their evil way; no where are the godly among them, advised to withdrawment; but to hold fast the truth they received; and to endeavour the purging out of corruptions (a). A variety of evils not purged out; a variety of inadvertant stumblings in a church pointing towards reformation, though never to be approved, warrant no separation. Nor will simple apostacy from reformation once attained, warrant it. We must *plead* with our *mother*, *plead*; till it plainly appear, nothing is gained by our pleading, but rather made worse (b).

Suppose the greater part of a church appear determined and obstinate in their apostacy to corruptions, notorious, and ruining to the very essentials of Christianity; the scripture warrants our separation. To *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*; to *turn away, to withdraw from brethren that walk disorderly*: to *come out of a corrupt church, and be separate*, lest we be *partakers in her plagues*: to *mark them, who, by their scandalous conduct, cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine we have received*: to *cease hearing the instruction, that causeth to err from the words of knowledge*: to beware of false guides; to beware of the *legal leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod*: to beware of receiving an heretic into our house, or bidding him *God speed*: to beware of being *unequally yoked*; or of having communion with darkness, or the unfruitful works thereof; is expressly required in the sacred page (c). To flee from hiring pastors, who run unsent of Christ; enter not by the door prescribed in his word; and care not for the flock, but their own carnal advantage, is divinely marked as the character of Jesus' sheep (d).

Absurdly, my friend, you tell me of Jesus and his apostles, prophets, and saints, their maintaining fellow-

(a) 1 Cor. i. 11. and v. 1. 2. and vi. 5. and viii. and xi. and xiv. and xv. &c. Gal. iii. and iv. Rev. ii. and iii. (b) Hos. ii. 2. (c) Jude 3. 2 Tim. iii. 1--5. 2 Thess. iii. 6. Rev. xviii. 4. Rom. xvi. 17. Prov. xix. 27. Mark viii. 15. 2 John 9--11. 2 Cor. vi. 14. (d) John x. 1--13.



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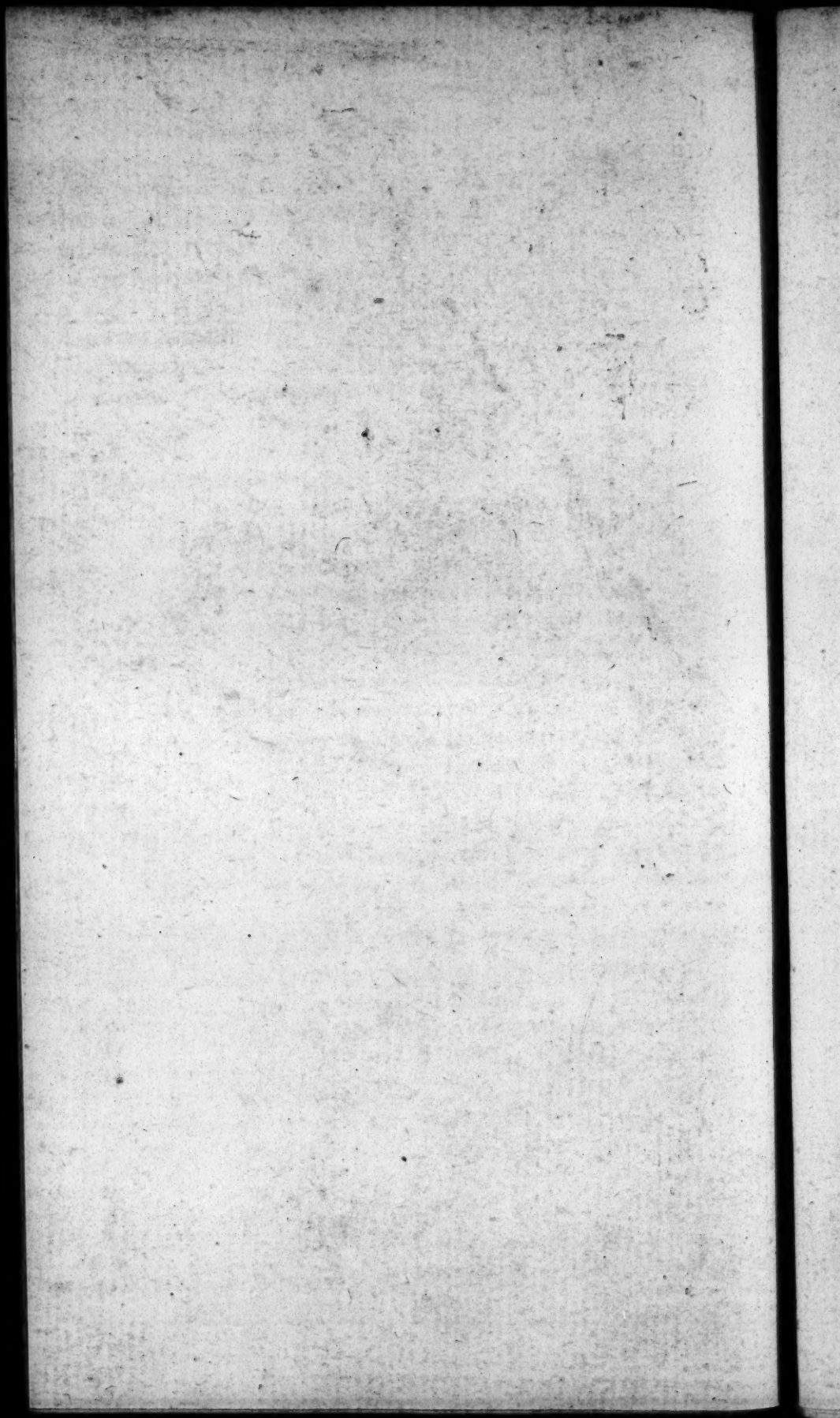
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"main." Who told you, my friend, Jesus had prescribed things trifling and useless? an enemy certainly did it. Should I pull off your tiles; pluck out your windows, or even the pinnings of your wall: should I cut down the thorn-hedge of your garden; would you tell me, there is no hurt done? the foundation, the inward furniture of my house is safe; my flowery beds and fruitful trees are unhurt? Would you not rather think your house and garden were ruined? the furniture of the former exposed to the chilling cold, the rotting rain, the robbing thief; the latter exposed to the trampling beast, the mischievous passenger? Discipline and government are the roof of Jesus' temple, the hedge of his garden, the church: how well the doctrine and worship, these weightier matters, remain in their glory, when these are destroyed and perverted, the present state of affairs can attest. How quickly do we seem to have a set of preachers and professors, whose sermons and life shall declare, they have not so much as heard, whether there be a divine law, spiritual and exceeding broad; whether there be a Christ, a Saviour exalted, to give repentance and remission of sins; whether there be a Holy Ghost to quicken and sanctify our soul?

Neglect not, Sir, mercy, judgment, and faith; but, as Jesus commands, leave not the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin undone. If you truly study these weightier matters of the law, will not your judgment discern the superior value of Jesus' ordinances, to all the inventions of men? discern the affronts done him, your glorious King? Will not your mercy pain your soul, for the injuries done your blessed Redeemer and God, and the laws of his house? Will not your faith embrace for divine, every one of his words; and work by love, opposing every thing contrary? If you know not, how concern about these, tends to your spiritual edification; blame your ignorance, not the statutes of Heaven. The ancient prophet was charged to shew *Ismael the house, that they might be ashamed of their iniquities, and measure the pattern; to shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the workings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances*

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ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: that they might keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be MOST HOLY: behold, this is the law of the house!



F I N I S.

